

PALESTINIAN-AMERICANS: CONSTRUCTION AND MAINTAINENCE OF POLITICAL  
AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN DIASPORA

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## ABSTRACT

Since 1948, Palestinians have lived in forced diaspora throughout the world. The circumstances of displacement has rendered it difficult to define a specific and bounded Palestinian identity. Palestinians all over the globe have individually constructed and maintained a sense of Palestinianness characterized by diversity, fluidity, and unboundedness.

These personalized definitions of Palestinian selfdom characterize identity among Palestinian-Americans. The historical factors that each individual has experienced have led to these differences and ambiguous positionings, yet each individual maintains they possess an identity as Palestinian. These individualized characteristics are constructed and maintained among interviewees of this study, all ironically different and similar.

In light of the unusual circumstances that plague construction and maintenance of Palestinian identity, Palestinian-Americans have utilized various sources that encourage collective selfdom. Walid Khalidi's, *Before Their Diaspora*, is a historical narrative that challenges hegemonic historiographies that deny the existence of the collective Palestinian historical past. Palestinian-Americans have utilized this medium as a source to affirm their collective historical, political, and cultural legitimacy and aid in the transmission of these identities to younger generations. Yet, *Before Their Diaspora* also represents the negation of the personal experience and diversity of identity inherent in Palestinians. This project focuses on analyzing this phenomenon by incorporating oral testimony as its primary research tool.

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This thesis is the culmination of a year of research, reading, interviewing, writing, and revising. Without each individual contribution below this product would not have been possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

Riding on Interstate 40 in heavy rush hour Raleigh, NC traffic in September 2005, my former Arabic instructor, Nasser, declared as he hastily weaved through cars, “don’t worry, I learned to drive during the *intifada*.” This assertion overwhelmed me. My sensation provoked deep thought into what I interpreted as my ambiguous position riding alongside my Palestinian friend and as a suddenly detached “unitedstatesian.”<sup>1</sup> At that moment I realized my contradictory position, as a naïve and privileged American student coupled with the connection to a national and cultural struggle thousands of miles away and twenty years prior. I was not a participant in that struggle in the late 1980s but I had a form of identification with it. The rationalization of this moment launched my interest into learning just how Palestinians in the United States defined their own positioning between these two worlds. What, then, are the various effects upon identity among Palestinians who live in the United States and still cling to their political, cultural, and historical loyalties and traditions from Palestine?

I initiated my research for this thesis with the goal of learning just how Palestinians in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina constructed and maintained their identity. I desired a broader understanding of how their political identity was maintained even though most Palestinians live in diaspora and a nation-state of Palestine does not exist. Also, I wanted to know how history, as a recollection of the past and a process leading to the present, has been utilized and understood in a way that affects this identity.

This work analyzes individual and collective identity among a select sampling of Palestinians in Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina. These Palestinians do not constitute

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<sup>1</sup> Unitedstatesian is a term used by Ted Swedenburg to describe his own contradictory positioning in *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), xxiii-xxv.

the entire community, but represent a sound example of the internationalized and diverse identities Palestinians possess. Without a nation-state and its institutions to create, construct, and foster a common national identity and considering the Palestinian diaspora, Palestinianism is characterized as a multidimensional, diverse, fluid, and local-global identity.<sup>2</sup> Palestinian identity represents a dynamic construction of selfhood because it is the site of internal and external overlapping and competing struggles. Internally, the attachment to place competes on a local and global scale. Interviewees' attachment to their American, Arab, and religious communities contests attachment to the collective Palestinian struggle. Conflicting national historical narratives compete externally between Zionists and Palestinians for historical legitimacy which filters into the local over time. The transnational and local linkages complicate the efforts to erect and maintain an official identity. The construction of an exclusive Palestinian national narrative neglects individual experience and identity as well. All these complicate the efforts to pin down a specific, neatly articulated character. This study will shed light on these dynamic layers of identity and illuminate events and circumstances in the experiences of Palestinians in the diaspora that have affected their own personal positioning and attachments.

Post-modern theory has challenged the very notion of nationalism and national identity as historical constructions, arguing for the relevance of localized and particular identities in the face of a globalizing and unifying economic and political processes. Taking into light these recent theoretical trends, this represents another obstacle to unifying Palestinians under a national ideology. Observing the Palestinian experience of migration, communal isolation, experiences of alienation, socioeconomic deprivation, colonialism and occupation, among other factors, add to the overwhelming odds of creating a unified collective Palestinian selfhood.

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<sup>2</sup> The term, Palestinianism, can be traced back to the work of Ibrahim Abu Lughod, "Educating a Community in Exile: The Palestinian Experience," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 2: 3 (Spring, 1973), 97: 94-111.

The Palestinian national movement has, until recently, existed primarily outside of the traditional geography of Palestine. After the Oslo Accords in 1993, the internationally recognized Palestinian leadership, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), returned from exile to Palestine for the first time since the establishment of Israel in 1948. Scholars have contended that the national movement previously had been divided between “inside” and “outside” traditional Palestine. With the movement of the leadership “inside” Palestine, this has caused a dilemma for Palestinian national identity, because the majority of Palestinians live “outside” of traditional Palestine in diaspora. Subsequently, the official national narrative written have excluded many of the historical experiences of the Palestinians “outside” of Palestine rendering the official national history as severely limited. In many ways this represents a conscious effort for the national leadership to consolidate its own hegemony over the Palestinians “inside” of West Bank and Gaza but also an accidental byproduct of the fact that since so many Palestinians live around the globe, Palestinian identity is inherently diverse and can not fit into an exclusive national narrative.

Entity-consciousness among the Palestinian interviewees of this study can be defined as a multidimensional identity mediating among Palestinian culture, American mainstream culture, and specific cultural tropes linked to Palestine and/or Islam. In relation to their Palestinian national identities, informants share a sense of injustice, struggle, and hope, themes that permeate Palestinian history stemming from the Palestinian catastrophe, *al-Nakba*, in 1948. Despite these similarities, distinct differences also exist in how these informants characterize their collective national past and their solution to perceived national disunity. Individuals can be categorized in one of the following three ways: 1) having ties to an individually perceived specific (yet I argue inherently dynamic and diverse) Palestinian political ideology and cultural



practices; 2) heavy emphasis on ties to Islamic and pan-Arab ideology; and 3) denying or purporting a lack of importance to Palestinianness and more emphasis on short-term individual and familial financial survival.<sup>3</sup> In some instances these differences have been accentuated since September 11, 2001 because of suspicion and pressure from mainstream American society, causing the breakdown of political and cultural clubs that provided a unified and common source of identity. A few interviewees even chose to downplay their Arab heritage by choosing American nick-names. Interviewees do not feel they are personally well represented by the Palestinian Authority, increasing their independence to express Palestinian identity and determine their positioning. These examples provide a glimpse to how Palestinian identity has become diversified.

This study argues that greater individual freedom now exists within these communities to define identity resulting from the decline of social integration because of the diaspora. The watershed event of September 11, 2001 impacted Arab-Americans generally by increasing the ambivalence and ambiguousness this community felt towards their relationships within American society. Yet, to Palestinians this ambiguousness in regards to positioning and identity was nothing new in their historical experiences since 1948. Palestinian identity constitutes a dynamic internationalized entity-consciousness but how does the Palestinian living in the diaspora receive information about his or her national background? Historical resources in picture books and on the internet have contributed to the passing of traditions and fostering historical legitimacy.

In Chapter One, I concentrate on the historical circumstances that have had key roles in the construction of Palestinian identity beginning with Zionist immigration into Palestine in

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<sup>3</sup> Palestinianness is a term coined by Fawaz Turki in his work, "To be a Palestinian," *Journal of Palestine Studies* Vol. 3: 3 (Spring, 1974), 11: 3-17.

1876. With regard to historiography, I focus on how historians have argued how events and displacement have shaped this ideology. I examine studies on identity conducted in disparate Palestinian communities in the Middle East, Honduras, and the United States.

In Chapter Two, I examine the construction and maintenance of Palestinian political and cultural identity within the growing Palestinian communities of Raleigh and Wilmington, North Carolina. In addition, I address how September 11, 2001 politicized and stigmatized Arab-Americans, leading to a decline in social integration within the local mainstream culture. The effect was not quite as great for Palestinians because as a community, Palestinian experience and identity was already rooted in ambivalence and ambiguity within the host societies. Yet, prior to this watershed event, mediums such as local cultural organizations and political clubs existed to develop a collective Palestinian identity. These groups publicly offered an alternative historical narrative and shared a rich cultural heritage in an effort to foster symbiosis and understanding with mainstream American society. Some of these activities after 9/11 ceased to exist because of outside social pressures, migration, and fear of American mainstream backlash. This oral history project proves that within the Raleigh and Wilmington Palestinian communities, some of the principle vehicles to cultural and political homogeneity were interrupted. The string of events that have fragmented Palestinians in the twentieth and into the twenty-first century have contributed to the ambiguousness and diversity of Palestinian identity globally.

Chapter Three examines how Walid Khalidi's book, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians 1876-1948*, presents photographic representations to justify the Palestinian national movement's claim that there was an existing, prosperous people living in traditional Palestine before British colonization and the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948. Khalidi's work is important mainly on two grounds. *Before Their Diaspora*

rebukes Western and Zionist academic claims that the Palestinian people did not exist in Palestine prior to 1948. Joan Peters' work, *From Time Immemorial: the Origins of the Arab/Jewish Conflict over Palestine*, illustrates one such work that argues the Palestinians were not indigenous to Palestine and therefore have an unjustified claim to that land. In addition, *Before Their Diaspora* represents a designed attempt to consolidate Palestinian history under an exclusive nationally historical narrative. Interviewees argued that these pictures demonstrated not only a legitimate Palestinian historical presence, but, as a visual representation, offered concrete evidence of a collective political and cultural identity. This work represents a designed attempt to foster a common attachment and identity perpetuating an exclusive Palestinian national image and historical narrative.

This study utilized the oral interview as its predominant research tool. In the Fall semester of 2004, I participated in a reading and discussion seminar on oral history at UNC Wilmington with Dr. Andrew Clark. This class heightened my appreciation and enthusiasm for oral research and provided the necessary foundation for conducting and processing interviews. Two texts from the class, Paul Thompson's, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, and Jan Vansina's, *Oral Tradition as History*, guided the theoretical approaches I incorporated into my interviews in addition to guiding me through the preparatory and executory stages of the interviewing process.<sup>4</sup> I also utilized Donald Ritchie's book, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide*, as well as referred to the Oral History Association and the American Historical Associations guidelines for designing oral history projects, interviewing, logistics, legal matters, transcription of interviews, and proper storage of the recordings.<sup>5</sup> As a historian interested in societies termed as post-colonial, subaltern, and presently Third-World, oral sources are

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<sup>4</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Third Edition 2000) and Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985).

<sup>5</sup> Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History: A Practical Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

especially imperative to the historian because written records have not given substantial objective attention to these societies. In utilizing my own interviews, I was consciously aware of Vansina's arguments on the importance of oral tradition. "Every traditional message has a particular purpose and fulfills a particular function, otherwise it would not survive...All messages are part of a culture."<sup>6</sup>

While studying Arabic at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill during the summer of 2004, I had the opportunity to meet many Palestinians and I became interested in how these individuals, proud and engaging in conversation about the Palestinian dilemma, defined themselves as Palestinians thousands of miles away from traditional Palestine. During my undergraduate work at UNCW, I took classes on the history of Palestine/Israel with Dr. Lisa Pollard. With a solid foundation in the history of these peoples and events, in August 2005 I began networking through my Arabic language instructor, a Palestinian, to come up with contacts who would agree to be interviewed.

Initially, I expected to undertake a project on *al-Nakba* but soon discovered that interviewees were not as forthcoming about this incident, because none of them had actually lived through it. On inquiring whether or not someone would be willing to meet with me, many times I was told that the potential interviewee did not speak English well enough or they were too busy. Those who agreed to speak on *al-Nakba* told hazy and nondescriptive stories. The interviews often veered off topic and I had to end it for time's sake. Later I decided that it was more rewarding to inquire into the nature of the informants' involvement with the national movement, their Palestinian community, and how they articulated their identity as Palestinian. Interviews on these topics became much more rewarding. Many of the Palestinians who had

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<sup>6</sup> Vansina, *Oral Tradition*, 100 and 124.

previously refused to interview on the history of *al-Nakba*, agreed to talk about their personal histories and identities.

The actual revised interview questions were prepared well in advance of the first interview and were primarily open-ended to foster long, descriptive answers. I prepared preliminary questions asking the interviewee's date of birth, place of birth, address, occupation, etc. I designed these to open the interviewee up and make him/her more comfortable. After completing these I moved on to my open-ended questions. How did events in Palestine and the Middle East shape your childhood? Did your parents ever talk to you about Palestine's history? When did you first realize you were Palestinian? What characteristics do you possess that other Palestinians possess as well? How would you describe your identity as a Palestinian? Does living in the United States change your identity as a Palestinian? Have you ever felt uncomfortable as a Palestinian in the United States? How have you tried to maintain Palestinian customs and traditions? Is the right of return important to you as a Palestinian? How have you asserted yourself as a Palestinian? How do you convey your identity as a Palestinian and the history of Palestine to your children? I tried to avoid leading questions so I was not simply provided answers the interviewees thought I would want to hear. All of the interviewees allowed me to record their testimonies on my small digital recorder. As soon as the interviews were over, I downloaded these onto my computer for safe keeping.

I qualified anyone for the interviewing process who had at least one Palestinian parent. Initially in Raleigh my Arabic language instructor introduced me to various Palestinians in the community that had agreed to interview. Later, one of these interviewees, Nasser, assumed responsibility to introduce me to Palestinians he knew. In Wilmington, Dr. Lisa Pollard introduced me to a local Palestinian. He later introduced me to Musa Agil, a local Palestinian

business owner, who connected me to other Palestinians in Wilmington. Interviewees came from diverse backgrounds going up in Gaza, the West Bank, Kuwait, Jordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, as well as within Israel's formal boundaries and the United States. I interviewed fifteen Palestinians, some times one-on-one, other times in groups. Of the fifteen, three were women. The informants' ages ranged from 12 to 78 years old. Interviewees had either immigrated to the United States between 1970 and 1996, or were born in the United States to immigrant parents. All informants greatly valued their sense of Palestinian identity. The differences occurred in respect to specific issues. Those who had immigrated to the United States and raised families took great pride in their background, traveled back to Palestine, and raised their children in "traditional" Palestinian ways. I surmise that each and every one of them has developed a cross-cultural identity since being here.

Oral sources are a vital component of any historical study concerned with societies and peoples originating in the post-colonial, subaltern, or so called Third World. While considerable written documents exist, limitations of the evidence inhibit a balanced portrayal of history or society without tapping into oral sources. Oral interviews fill noticeable gaps in written records. Often oral sources provide different perspectives on history when compared to written documentation. Oral sources allow the researcher unique insights into how people, ignored in the historical record, perceive and interpret their own history. Written and oral sources provide a prism, not a window, on history and personal experience. Oral sources have been criticized for their unreliable characteristics and dynamic meanings, but every written and oral source has a purpose that is rarely purely historical. Each source should be approached as a historical primary

document, undeniably part of history's dynamic processes. By combining written and oral evidence, a more reasonable and balanced synthesis of history and experience can be reached.<sup>7</sup>

This study revolves around terms and ideas paramount to understanding the Palestinian past, present, and future. Since my thesis explores Palestinians living in the United States, I found it fitting to utilize the experiences of this community by allowing them directly to express themselves through oral testimony. I sought to capture their own attachments, passions, concerns, and voices in this study, giving clarity to the ambiguous and, at times, contradictory positionings Palestinians have endured, and continue to endure.

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<sup>7</sup> This argument on the validity of oral sources in the historical record can be found in Andrew Clark's work, *From Frontier to Backwater: Economy and Society in the Upper Senegal Valley (West Africa), 1850-1920* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999), 16-20.

## CHAPTER 1

### PALESTINIAN IDENTITY IN HISTORY

Palestinian identity has tended to remain understudied as a result of the imposing obstacles created by the lack of infrastructure and sources of empirical data historians typically rely on when researching. The absence of national archives, well-entrenched educational institutions, and a critical mass of intellectuals are a few of the shortcomings researchers have to deal with. Scholarship on Palestinians primarily focuses on the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Over the last twenty years, scholars have begun to make up for this deficiency by concentrating their studies on Palestinian society and culture as it existed in the past. The largest hurdle to overcome when analyzing Palestinian identity results from the impact of diaspora. The vast majority of Palestinians have settled across the globe. The substantiality of the dispersement has left scholars agreeing that Palestinian identity can only be characterized as diverse, unbounded, and fluid.

Palestinian identity has largely been formulated outside of traditional Palestine. These circumstances stem from *al-Nakba* (the catastrophe). 726,000 Palestinians emigrated from traditional Palestine to other parts of the Arab world, Europe, and the Americas beginning in 1948.<sup>8</sup> Most went to neighboring Arab countries such as Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Egypt where they became refugees. Today approximately eighty percent of Palestinian refugees live within a hundred miles of the borders of historical Palestine.<sup>9</sup> The War of 1948 (*al-Nakba* to Palestinians and the War of Independence for Israelis) and the creation of the nation-state of

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<sup>8</sup> Figures have been debated, with a wide range of estimates. This one represents an average and is used by UNRWA. [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org).

<sup>9</sup> Marie-Louise Weighill, "Palestinians in Exile: Legal, Geographical and Statistical Aspects" in *The Palestinian Exodus 1948-1998* eds. by Ghada Karmi and Eugene Cotrane (Reading, UK: Ithaca, 1999), 15.



Israel was a watershed event, creating the Palestinian refugee problem, central to the conflict. Many politicians, scholars, and humanitarian organizations have given their attention to the refugee issue. Palestinian refugees living in the Arab world have survived with the assistance of international organizations, such as the United Nations and its agency on the spot, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Politically, the lack of a viable solution to the refugee question has been one of the core issues surrounding efforts to reach a settlement that will ensure peace and end this conflict.

The refugee question is central to both sides in the conflict. For the Palestinian collective memory, political life, and national movement, any solution that ignores those living in the diaspora is an unacceptable answer. For the Israelis it is illogical and inconceivable to accept the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and lands they occupied before 1948 because it would undermine the homogeneous Jewish character essential in Zionist ideology. The preferred solution is to leave the Palestinians settled as refugees in the neighboring Arab countries.

The causes behind the Palestinian refugee problem have become very well documented over the last twenty years. A new historiography of the events surrounding 1948 has been written with full access to official Israeli and Western documents. Earlier writers had partial or no access to official documents. Historiographies have become a ground of conflict and debate among scholars in the two camps.<sup>10</sup> The newest historiographies of the war of 1948 argue the indigenous Palestinian population was pressured either by the threat of oncoming war, violence or massacres of civilians, and in some cases by involuntary expulsion by the Zionists leading the Palestinians to seek safe haven elsewhere. The source, however of this pressure is still passionately debated.

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<sup>10</sup> The “Revisionist” or “New” histories include the works of Avi Shlaim, Ilan Pappé, Simha Flapan, Uri Milstein, Michael Cohen, Anita Shapira, Uri Bar-Joseph and others.

The new historiography challenges the older paradigms by depicting the Palestinian perspective in a far more supportive light. Palestinians have been given more attention and most of the scrutiny has been refocused onto Israeli policy rather than on short-sighted Palestinian reactions. Revisionist historian Benny Morris argued that the Palestinian flight took on a complex character. Morris rejected the Israeli claim of Palestinian voluntary flight while simultaneously dismissing the Palestinian narrative of mass expulsion.<sup>11</sup> Nur Masalha directly contests Morris' conclusions. Masalha, echoing Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, argued that the 1948 Palestinian expulsion plan had its roots in the Zionist transfer scheme of 1882.<sup>12</sup> In support of his argument, Masalha quoted Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion in a letter, dated 5 October 1937, to his 16-year-old son Amos, stating, "We must expel Arabs and take their places...and if we have to use force-not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle those places--when we have force at our disposal."<sup>13</sup>

Revisionist historians allege the Palestinian refugees of 1948 expected to return shortly after the war was over. Barred from reentering what had become the nation-state of Israel, however, the refugees received assistance from their Arab host countries until the United Nations agency, UNRWA, was established by the General Assembly under Resolution 302 in 1949. UNRWA undertook direct relief and service programs for Palestinian refugees. UNRWA's official operational definition of Palestinian refugees reads:

Palestine refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict. UNRWA's services are available to all those living in its area of operations who meet this definition, who are registered with the Agency and

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<sup>11</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Khalidi's arguments can be found in "Why did the Palestinians Leave? An Examination of the Zionist Version of the Exodus of 1948," *Middle East Forum* 35 no.7 (1959): 21-24.

<sup>13</sup> David Ben-Gurion from Shabtai Teveth's, *Ben-Gurion and the Palestinian Arabs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 189; quoted in Nur Masalha, "A Critique on Benny Morris," in *The Israel/Palestine Question* ed. Ilan Pappé (New York: Routledge, 1999), 216.

who need assistance. UNRWA's definition of a refugee also covers the descendants of persons who became refugees in 1948.<sup>14</sup>

Since its formation, the organization has fed, housed, clothed, and provided health care and education to thousands of Palestinians in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, the West Bank, and Gaza camps. UNRWA has become the main provider of basic services to the refugee communities numbering today over 4.1 million persons in the Middle East.<sup>15</sup> In the absence of a permanent peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, UNRWA has had its mandate repeatedly renewed. Over the last fifty years, the agency has had to reorganize itself from a temporary organization to one responsible for the changing long-term needs of the refugees.

The unstable characteristics of camp life and the oscillating relationship between Palestinians and their host countries has continuously contributed to many refugees not receiving aid because they have not properly registered with UNRWA. Migration between camps and out of the region has kept some refugees from receiving aid as well. Others, for political reasons, have chosen not to register themselves as homeless refugees because they believe it legitimizes Israel's political right to exist and negates their own right to return to their homes and land.<sup>16</sup> Signe Gilen's study of Palestinians in refugee camps argues that three main factors have influenced the status of Palestinian refugees in their host countries: the external character of legal definitions for them; the conflict of interest between Palestinians and the host country at the state level, including the security and benefit of the state; and the inherent contradiction between the Palestinians interest in securing civil rights involving whether Palestinians claim citizenship

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<sup>14</sup> "What is a Palestinian Refugee," [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org).

<sup>15</sup> Overview of UNRWA's mission and services can be found at: [www.unrwa.org](http://www.unrwa.org).

<sup>16</sup> Signe Gilen, *Finding Ways: Palestinian Coping Strategies in Changing Environments: Report 177* (Oslo: FAFO, 1994), 24.

in the host country to obtain legal status or maintain their refugee identity and technically not be protected or given legal rights by their host nation.<sup>17</sup>

Studies of refugees in Africa and the Middle East by John Rogge and Nicholas Van Hear have concluded that refugee situations can be solved in three ways: repatriation, permanent settlement in the first country of asylum, or resettlement in a third country willing to accept and absorb the refugees.<sup>18</sup> The case of Palestinians deviates from these authors' conclusions. Palestinians, though they share a similar cultural identity and language, have not been absorbed into their Arab host countries. Arab and Muslim governments, in particular, have been adamant in demanding Israel uphold United Nations Resolution 194, passed in 1948, calling for the refugees to return to their homes in Palestine. Israel will not allow the refugees to return insisting that this would create a demographic juggernaut. Palestinians refuse to accept resettlement because it jeopardizes their political claims of return.

Palestinians have been living in exile and diaspora for over fifty years. Their status and well-being as refugees is dependent on their host country, their relationships with UNRWA, and the ever changing political climate in the Middle East. While some Palestinians have achieved economic stability all over the world, secured citizenship, and developed multiple identities and loyalties, their identity as Palestinians always stresses their condition as refugees, victims, and a profound sense of being out of place.<sup>19</sup>

Over the last half century, the Palestinian diaspora has contributed greatly to the unbounded and diverse nature of contemporary Palestinian identity. The largest obstacle to

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid, 40.

<sup>18</sup> John R. Rogge, "Repatriation of Refugees: A Not So Simple Optimum Solution," in *When Refugees Go Home: African Experiences*. Eds. Tim Allen and Hubert Morisk (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994), 16; and Nicholas Van Hear, *Reintegrating Refugees: Opportunities and Constraints*, Monograph Series No. 6 (Ramallah: SHAML, 1997), 15.

<sup>19</sup> The description of being "out of place" is a reference to Edward Said's work, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Knopf, 1999).

writing about Palestinians collectively is the fact that of the estimated population of nine million Palestinians in 2003, half live outside of traditional Palestine.<sup>20</sup> Palestinians live on six continents and carry over a hundred passports. These circumstances make it difficult to generalize on the Palestinian experience and their collective history when they inhabit all corners of the globe. Studies have mostly concentrated on the status of the refugees and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Because not all Palestinians have migrated as a direct cause of expulsion or wars with Israel has been unfortunately neglected. The reality of the Palestinian experience and identity is very complex.

The main causes of migration for most Palestinians were the wars of 1948 and 1967. According to studies of migration after each war, most Palestinians did not abandon their homes and villages with the intention of permanently leaving the area and not returning. Most sought safety from the fighting in nearby villages, with family or friends.<sup>21</sup> In addition, migration has occurred as a result of political persecution, economic pressure, and the forced eviction of political activists.<sup>22</sup> After 1967, Israel oppressed Palestinian political and economic activities in Gaza and the West Bank. The economic deterioration of these two areas has also led many Palestinians to leave for Arab countries or the West.

The impact of 1948 and dispersal of the majority of Palestinians around the globe has had a profound effect on how Palestinians define and articulate their own identity. In studies of Palestinian camps in Lebanon, Rosemary Sayigh argues that Palestinian refugees have developed

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<sup>20</sup> PASSIA: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem.

<sup>21</sup> Studies that give historical detail include: Salman Abu-Sitta, "The Right of Return: Sacred, Legal and Possible Too" (Palestinian Return Committee, [www.prc.org.uk](http://www.prc.org.uk)); Walid Khalidi, *All that Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Palestine Studies, 1992); Sharif Kanaana, *Still on Vacation! The Eviction of the Palestinians in 1948* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem International Center for Palestinian Studies, 1992); Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947-49* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>22</sup> Julianne Hammer, *Palestinians Born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 15.

a distinct national identity within the camps, often in direct conflict with their host country. According to Sayigh, the concentration of Palestinians in and around the camps has contributed significantly to the development of a Palestinian national identity. Since the 1960s, camps became the bastion of the national liberation movements. Sayigh contends that the isolation of the settlements created unique differences in national identities between the Palestinian camps resulting in diverse definitions of Palestinianness among the refugees.<sup>23</sup> Relative isolation and communal movements leading to distinctive local identities is important for Sayigh's study. In another study, Sayigh asserted that prior to 1948 Palestinians had two ways of identifying themselves: as Arabs and as a part of a particular place, class, and sect. Their specific experiences of 1948 differentiated them from other Arabs, therefore emphasizing Palestinian otherness within their host countries.<sup>24</sup>

Integration into a host's society has been an obstacle for many Palestinians. Various factors such as living conditions and legal status have affected their condition of integration. Lebanon can be seen as an example of a country that has placed many obstacles before Palestinian migrants. Palestinians are not entitled to passports, but only to a refugee document granting them the right to temporary residency. Palestinians are excluded by law from certain professions and the right to own real estate. While this exemplifies a host society deliberately restricting integration, lack of assimilation can also be seen as a result of the political attachment of many Palestinians to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). The PLO has proved influential in accentuating the difference between migrants and the host societies by articulating a specific identity for Palestinians and by staging guerilla operations from Jordan and

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<sup>23</sup> See two of Sayigh's works: Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (London: Zed, 1994) and *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Rosemary Sayigh, "The Palestinian Identity among Camp Residents," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 6 no.3 (1977): 3-22.

Lebanon against Israel resulting in Israeli indiscriminant retaliations against the Palestinians and their hosts, Jordan and Lebanon.<sup>25</sup>

While many Palestinians have had difficulty assimilating into their host societies, a small minority of Palestinians from the middle and upper class have experienced a higher degree of integration because of their higher educational levels and economic capital. Examples include some Palestinians living in Lebanon and Kuwait prior to the first Gulf War in 1990. The overwhelming majority of Palestinians between 1948 and 1966 as Pamela Ann Smith argues encountered the already overtaxed situation in the agricultural sector of the surrounding Arab countries condemning most of the peasants, who had lost land, their own source of livelihood, to a life of poverty.<sup>26</sup>

In 2000, the United States census bureau identified around 1.5 million Arab-Americans living in the U.S. The Arab-American Institute (AAI), a non-profit organization in Washington D.C., released its own findings in 2000 estimating 3.5 million Arab-Americans live in the U.S. The AAI challenged the Census Bureau's findings because of limitations of the questions concerning ethnicity and respondents lack of interest in disclosing their ethnicity. Of their estimated 3.5 million Arab-Americans, the AAI reported that approximately six percent, or between 200,000 and 250, 000, were of Palestinian ethnicity. The largest overall numbers of Palestinians live in the state of Illinois, in addition to many who have settled in the major metropolitan areas of Los Angeles, New York, Detroit, and Washington D.C.

In her study on the Palestinian experience in the U.S. before the first Gulf War in 1990, Kathleen Christison persists that, compared to the other immigrant communities, Palestinians and their offspring are highly politically conscious of and deeply involved in the politics of their

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>26</sup> Pamela Ann Smith, "The Palestinian Diaspora 1948-1985," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15 no.3 (1986): 93.

native land. They are not necessarily politically active, however to a surprising degree.

According to Christison, American-born Palestinians exhibit a growing degree of political consciousness and ethnic pride in their Palestinian roots.<sup>27</sup> Ethnicity is not apparently force fed from Palestinian parents to children. Christison argues that Palestinian children are allowed to make their own choices and easily adapt to balancing American and Palestinian identity.<sup>28</sup>

Within their American host country, Christison finds that most Palestinians passively accept becoming American because of the lack of alternative places for them to go. Others insist this is a temporary stop in the diaspora. Interestingly, there is no correlation between Palestinian nationalism and the degree of assimilation.<sup>29</sup> In summing up Palestinian identity in the United States, Christison states:

Because there is Palestinian land but no homeland, because that land is under foreign occupation, and because Palestinians have refused to accede to that occupation without some political compensation, there is for a great many Palestinians a sense of incompleteness in the adoption of any other homeland, a sense of something still to come that perpetuates the vision of a foreign homeland and thereby differentiates them from other immigrant Americans.<sup>30</sup>

The experience of migration introduces new ideas and concepts into one's worldview and identity. It can lead to a rethinking of one's one ethnicity and therefore breakdown or even strengthen the boundaries between oneself and the "other." In her study of Palestinian Christians living in the city San Pedro Sula, Honduras, Nancie Gonzalez argues that Palestinian migration to this tiny Central American country has strengthened their embrace of what they deem as cultural traditions and preserving family practices. Gonzalez states that since the Palestinians have been forced out of their homeland into diaspora, "the people retain a myth of their

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<sup>27</sup> Kathleen Christison, "The American Experience: Palestinians in the U.S.," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18 no. 4 (1989): 18-19.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 19.



uniqueness.”<sup>31</sup> Palestinians in Honduras have established themselves as entrepreneurs within their host country while importing goods for consumption from Palestine and have generally maintained marriage within the Palestinian ethnic community.

Palestinians from Bethlehem have been migrating to Honduras for over one hundred years becoming acculturated into local culture while simultaneously belonging to and maintaining connections to Palestinians in the West Bank. Gonzalez purports that immigration to Honduras has been easier for these Christian Palestinians because of religious connections with the local Honduran culture. Over the last half century, Palestinians in Honduras have experienced a resurgence of Palestinian nationalism as a result of the establishment of Israel. Migration among these Palestinians has created a more-complex society and fostered new movements among Palestinians that transgress what they deem as limits to their culture and create a new hybrid cultural identity between the two worlds of Honduras and Palestine.

Julianne Hammer, in a recent study on identity and migration, conducted an oral history of Palestinians between the ages of sixteen and thirty-five who have returned to Palestine from the U.S., Europe, and Arab countries after the signing of the Oslo Peace Accords in 1993. This study describes the search for a homeland among her informants that grew up in the diaspora and their multifaceted experiences upon immigrating to the West Bank and the Gaza Strip to settle. Hammer argues that Palestinians, while spread all over the globe, shared a common national identity, yet in reality know very little about each other. What is especially unique about Hammer’s informants, is that neither they nor their families had grown up in refugee camps. Upon their arrival in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, their own place among the Palestinians

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<sup>31</sup> Nancie Gonzalez, *Dollar, Dove, and Eagle: One Hundred Years of Palestinian Migration to Honduras* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 31.

that grew up in the refugee camps was one of slight resentment and apprehension.<sup>32</sup> Hammer concluded that Palestinian global separateness and individualized experiences has created multifaceted identities. Hammer contended that the Palestinian predicament is too complex simply to place all Palestinians under one collectivized identity and experience. Consistent migration among many Palestinians quickly blurs boundaries, experiences, attachments, and identities.<sup>33</sup>

Taking this reality of constant movement into consideration makes this statement by Rashid Khalidi in his introduction to *Palestinian Identity* ring more loudly:

The quintessential Palestinian experience, which illustrates some of the most basic issues raised by Palestinian identity, takes place at a border, an airport, a checkpoint: in short, at any of those many modern barriers where identities are checked and verified. What happens to Palestinians at these crossing points brings home to them how much they share in common as a people. For it is at these borders and barriers that the six million Palestinians are singled out for “special treatment,” and are forcefully reminded of their identity: of who they are, and of why they are different from others.<sup>34</sup>

Palestinian identity today exists as a fluid, unbounded, internationalized selfhood subjected to intense political and scholarly debate. Since 1948, their collective experiences as refugees and migrants have provided difficulties in articulating a shared sense of national identity. In addition, Israel has referred to its own historiography to support its political claims that Palestinians do not exist as a people or as their neighbors. Only in the last ten years has Israel made some concessions that give Palestinians the right to self-determination in a form yet to be defined.

The emergence of scholarship on Palestinian identity directly parallels the evolution of theory and political challenges. In 1975, Khalil Nakhleh argued that Israeli Arabs acquired a sense of identity as a part of the Palestinian people and with other Arabs of Palestine. Nakhleh

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<sup>32</sup> See Hammer, *Palestinians Born*.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 1.

points out that the Israeli Arabs perceived themselves as a people in a particular territory with common speech, a shared historical experience but not ethnically Palestinian, rather Arab ethnicity. *Al Nakba* in 1948 and the loss of territory caused the Palestinians to become aware of the territorial component of their group identity. According to Nakhleh, it developed into a symbol of “autonomy, stability, and return.”<sup>35</sup> Nakhleh’s conclusions run closely to Rosemary Sayigh’s from her interviews with refugees in Lebanon.

Edward Said’s study, *The Question of Palestine*, broke new ground in questioning how Zionism impacted Palestine and Palestinians prior to 1948. Said states that as a result of Islamic expansion out of the Hijaz in the seventh century, Palestine became a predominately Arab and an Islamic region soon after.<sup>36</sup> In the nineteenth century, as a result of British and Zionist colonization, the collective opposition to these two foreign forces accentuated Palestinian belonging to the Arab nation, creating a sense of community through common language and the perceived collective threat to Palestinians from outside the region.

While these scholars point to 1948 as the watershed event that further developed the distinctiveness of identity among the Palestinians, Issa Shuaibi in a series of articles in the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 1979 and 1980, contended that the development of Palestinian national identity was destroyed in 1948 with the dispersal of the Palestinian people. The mandate period had provided the Palestinians with a sense of “both particularist identity and a link to the Arab World.”<sup>37</sup> Shuaibi believed that following 1948, the concept of a particular Palestinian entity did not exist until the 1960s and the emergence of FATAH movement.

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<sup>35</sup> Khalil Nakhleh, “Cultural Determinates of Palestinian Collective Identity,” *New Outlook* 18 (November, 1975): 34.

<sup>36</sup> Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 10.

<sup>37</sup> Issa Shuaibi, “The Development of Palestinian Entity-Consciousness, Part One,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 9 no.1 (1979): 67-84; “Part 2” 9 no.2 (1980): 50-70; “Part 3” 9 no.3 (1980): 90-124.

In 1997, Rashid Khalidi rejected the assumption that Palestinian identity had emerged as a response to British colonialism and the rise of Zionism. Instead, Khalidi asserted that the formative years of Palestinian identity was between 1917 and 1923 in addition, Zionism only helped shape the form of this identity.<sup>38</sup> The Palestinian urban elite during this time period increasingly accepted a, “growing national identification with Palestine, as the Arab residents of the country increasingly came to ‘imagine’ themselves as part of a single community.”<sup>39</sup>

The historical development of Palestinian national identity began with two main developments in the Middle East around the beginning of the twentieth century. The internal restructuring and weakening of the Ottoman Empire’s control over its hinterlands during this time period increasingly fueled the rise of Arab nationalism. In addition, Jewish immigration to Palestine and the establishment of early Zionist settlements created tension amongst the established Palestinian peasantry. Khalidi emphasized that while Jews legally bought land to build their settlements, the Palestinian peasantry, the *fellahin*, met these strangers with apprehension and often violent opposition. These rural outbursts, such as the Arab revolt of 1936, were supported by Arab intellectuals and politicians.<sup>40</sup>

According to Khalidi, the second major development occurred with the rise of Arab print media after the turn of the century. Nationalist feelings and identities were given a boost by the emergence of newspapers and journals. In major Middle Eastern urban centers such as Beirut and Cairo, the debate over Zionism was found in the media. Eventually the debate spread into the urban areas of Palestine, such as Khalidi states that Palestinian intellectuals were touched

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<sup>38</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 20.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>40</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian*, 114.

significantly by the rise of Arab nationalism and the debate over Zionism during this time period.<sup>41</sup>

In Palestine after the end of World War I, the colonization of Palestine by the British, the increasing settlement of Zionists, and the British support of these settlements in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 caused considerable protest and resistance by the Palestinian population especially the, “urban, literate upper and middle class and highly politicized segments of the population.”<sup>42</sup> National protest was organized by many different players. Islamic movements, headed by prominent religious figures, collaborated with the national movements merging the religious and pan-Arab struggle.<sup>43</sup> The press and educational systems even developed a discourse centered on aiding the spread of Arab nationalism.<sup>44</sup>

Other studies have also emphasized the beginnings of Palestinian national identity beginning in the early twentieth century. Baruch Kimmerling, Joel Migdal, and Muhammad Muslih argued that the Muslim-Christian Associations (MCAs), formed in Jaffa in 1918, advocated for Palestinianism and anti-Zionism.<sup>45</sup>

In 1936, the Palestinian protests against British rule and Zionist settlements spilled over into what became known as the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939. The revolt was mainly carried out by the Palestinian peasants, the *fellahin*, under the leadership of various urban intellectuals and

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 119-144.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 173.

<sup>43</sup>Musa Budeiri, “The Palestinians: Tensions between nationalist and Religious Identities,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* eds. James Jankowski and Israel Gershoni (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 191-206.

<sup>44</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian*, 172.

<sup>45</sup> See Baruch Kimmerling and Joel Migdal, *Palestinians: the Making of a People* (New York: The Free Press, 1993) and Muhammad Muslih, *The Origins of Palestinian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

political leaders. Economic decline, growing Zionist settlement, and shifts in the demographic and social structure of Palestine spurred the peasants to revolt.<sup>46</sup>

The Arab revolt of 1936 heightened the symbolism of the peasant in Palestinian national identity. The *fellahin* became a “national signifier” in Palestinian historiography and nationalist discourse through PLO institutions during and after the 1960s.<sup>47</sup> Ted Swedenburg points out that this restaging of the national past serves as, “one of the fundamental discursive producers of identity.”<sup>48</sup> Swedenburg argues that the peasant, in this historical narrative, became the central “symbolic representative of the cultural and historical continuity of the Palestinian people” because of their attachment to the land of Palestine.<sup>49</sup> This attachment to the land within the national movement has developed “an ideology of timeless rural tradition” in order to confront anyone or any ideology that claims fragmentation or destruction of Palestinian society prior to 1948.<sup>50</sup>

Scholars have stressed that the Arab Revolt of 1936-1939 marked a nationalist politicization of the lower class Palestinians and spread nationalist ideas to the underprivileged class, the peasantry.<sup>51</sup> Socioeconomic deprivation merged with nationalist grievances and Islamic symbolism and was used in nationalist discourse connected to the land, the peasantry, and religious idioms. The revolt represented a “folk nationalism” and “folk Islam.”<sup>52</sup> In addition according to Kimmerling and Migdal:

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<sup>46</sup> See Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt: The 1936-1939 Rebellion and the Palestinian National Past* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

<sup>47</sup> Swedenburg, “The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 63 (January, 1990): 18.

<sup>48</sup> Swedenburg, “Popular Memory and the Palestinian National Past,” in *Golden Ages, Dark Ages: Imagining the Past in History and Anthropology* eds. Jay O’Brian and William Rosenberry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 155.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>51</sup> Rosemary Sayigh, *From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (London: Zed Books, 1979), 45.

<sup>52</sup> Helena Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction of Palestinian Nationalism: Between Revolution and Statehood* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 29.

Paradoxically, the revolt was a distinct watershed, crystallizing the Palestinian national identity as nothing before. It offered new heroes and martyrs-most prominently Sheikh Qassam-and a popular culture to eulogize them...the revolt helped to create a nation.<sup>53</sup>

The national identity in Palestine prior to 1948 also took on gendered characteristics that Sheila Katz analyzes in her recent study. New politicized masculinities conflated the land, *ard*, with women, *adama*.. Palestinian nationalists believed that a key ingredient in Palestinian masculine identity is the male reverence for land and women. Control over land and control over women's sexuality, became a central metaphor in obtaining national honor.<sup>54</sup> Central to this concept is the Arab symbolism of blood as the answer to the barrenness of the land. It alone would impregnate the female earth, nurturing the people, and giving life to the nation.<sup>55</sup> Katz writes that women became the:

...symbol of the immutable and eternal national qualities of an ancient people, the daily producer of an authentic national culture, the reproducer of new citizens, and the way to measure progress, modernity, and legitimacy.<sup>56</sup>

Nationalists articulated women's identity as serving the nation best through their role as mother and wife. According to Katz, "the primary sacrifice of a woman for her nation was to become a national womb, a producer and rearer of citizens, and a nurturer of men and their goals."<sup>57</sup> Nationalists idealized Palestinian women's roles in modernizing and legitimizing the nation along several pillars such as cleanliness in hygiene, housekeeping, and the education of girls. Together these ideals became a yardstick of measuring modernity and nation-building according to Arab nationalists. Women within the nationalist writings became images demonstrating difference, irreconcilable and essential, between the Arabs and Jews. These

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<sup>53</sup> Kimmerling and Migdal, *Palestinians: The Making*, 123.

<sup>54</sup> Sheila H. Katz, *Women and Gender in Early Jewish and Palestinian Nationalism*. (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003), 82-85.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

images strengthened the belief in the inferiority of the “other” and deepened desires for independence.<sup>58</sup>

The collective national identity scholars have emphasized amongst the Palestinians could prevent or resist the events of 1948. Expulsion and migration destroyed the traditional social structure of Palestinian society and disconnected the rural populations from their source of livelihood, the land. According to Khalidi, ultimately, *al-Nakba* and its shared trauma:

Reinforced preexisting elements of identity, sustaining and strengthening a Palestinian self-definition that was already present. The shared events of 1948 thus brought the Palestinians closer together in terms of their collective consciousness, even as they were physically dispersed all over the Middle East and beyond.<sup>59</sup>

Scholars maintain that after 1948 it has become increasingly difficult to define a coherent and collective Palestinian identity because of the global dispersal of the Palestinians. Even so, since *al-Nakba* the resurgence of a collective Palestinian identity has paralleled the emergence of the national movement after 1967. Before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, one study charges that Palestinians became susceptible to the political ideologies of the nation-states in which they newly resided. Universities became the main bases for the spread of regional ideologies such as Arab nationalism, propagated mostly by Egypt’s Gamal Nasser. The Arab Nationalist movement became, in the 1950s, a popular front dedicated to the liberation of imperialism in the Middle East, to take revenge on the defeats of 1948, and to liberate Palestine.<sup>60</sup>

The regional unitary movements did not prevent unofficial organization of national movements. By 1959, students in Kuwait, Egypt, and the Gaza Strip formed the radical group al-FATAH (reverse acronym: al-Harakat al Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastin or Palestinian national liberation movement). Palestinian territorial nationalism in its modern form owes its beginnings

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<sup>58</sup> Katz’s Chapter 10 is dedicated to proving this point, 134-146.

<sup>59</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian*, 22.

<sup>60</sup> Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction*, 31.



to this movement. The basic idea behind al-FATAH was to liberate Palestine first, with liberation of the other Arab states from the yoke of Western imperialism deemed as a secondary issue. In another similar step, in 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was formed in Jerusalem by the Arab League. Its creation was intended to better control the underground national movements, in accordance with Nasser's regional power ambitions.<sup>61</sup>

The 1960s formed a radical turning point for Palestinian national identity. Another catastrophe, the defeat of the Arabs in 1967, caused a wave of embitterment among Palestinians. Nasser's Arab unity movement had failed spurring the al-FATAH guerilla activities to increase contributing to its popularity soaring among Palestinians. In 1969, a young leader of FATAH, Yasir Arafat, was elected Chairman of the PLO. Historian Yazid Sayigh stated, "FATAH's capture of the parastatal structure of the PLO was a major step towards the consolidation of a common political arena and consequently of Palestinian proto-nationalism."<sup>62</sup>

This time period in history can be characterized by a major shift in Palestinian identity. Loss, which had been central to defining one's identity, became replaced with an assertive and active identity, a culture characterized by the revolutionary and defiant guerilla, unwilling to surrender.<sup>63</sup> The dichotomy of struggle/resistance and suffering/sacrifice gradually became to embody the Palestinian narrative of selfhood and history.<sup>64</sup> More so, as Yezid Sayigh has phrased it:

The dramatic rise of the guerrilla movement after the battle of Karama created a new myth. To declare Palestinian identity no longer means that one is a "refugee" or second-class citizen. Rather, it is a declaration that arouses pride, because the Palestinian has become the *fida'i* or revolutionary who bears arms. Armed struggle was the source of

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<sup>61</sup> Yezid Sayigh, "The Armed Struggle and Palestinian Nationalism," in *The PLO and Israel: From Armed Conflict to Political Settlement, 1964-1994* eds. Avraham Sela and Moshe Ma'oz (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 99.

<sup>62</sup> Sayigh, "The Armed Struggle," 220.

<sup>63</sup> Kimmerling and Midgal, *Palestinians: The Making*, 220.

<sup>64</sup> Lindholm Schulz, *The Reconstruction*, 37.

political legitimacy and national identity, the new substance of the “imagined community” of Palestinians.<sup>65</sup>

Gender roles changed so that women’s issues became subordinated even more to the national struggle. Women were pictured in traditional dress carrying a gun symbolizing the national struggle. Women sacrificed their sons and husbands to the national struggle. Men were the guerilla and the *Intifada* fighter while women were the suffering, representing the defeated, and the pain.<sup>66</sup>

In the 1970s, the Palestinian national movement faced severe crises stemming from its rejected presence in Jordan to growing issues between Palestinians imagined as living “inside” and “outside” Palestine. In the 1970s, those Palestinians living under Israel rule began to be considered privileged, because they were there on the spot, struggling and resisting, in Palestine. This powerful and symbolic shift from Palestinians “outside” traditional Palestine to those living “inside” is seen most clearly with the start of the *Intifada* in 1987. The uprising itself caught the PLO by surprise and called for new strategies in the national struggle, thereby moving the center of activity back to Palestine.<sup>67</sup>

For Palestinian identity, the first *Intifada* represented the pride of the Palestinians and the *sumud* (steadfastness) of the people engaged in the struggle. While the “outside” leadership was shocked by its success and gained international recognition and acceptance to the Madrid negotiations in the early 1990s, it was the “inside” that the growing weight can be attributed to.<sup>68</sup>

With the movement of the Palestinian leadership into the West Bank and the Gaza Strip following the Oslo Accords of 1993, the national movement had come in a complete circle. Palestinians had been hoping that after signing the accords and other agreements their desire for

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<sup>65</sup> Sayigh, “The Armed Struggle,” 195.

<sup>66</sup> Rosemary Sayigh, *Too Many Enemies*, 103.

<sup>67</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 200.

<sup>68</sup> Hammer, *Palestinians Born*, 39.

statehood would finally be achieved. Recently, many of the same partners who signed agreements with the Palestinian leadership have challenged these individuals and made it difficult for Palestinians to foster the institutions needed in order to have a nation-state and foster a national identity. In 2000, Palestinian frustration with continued Israeli occupation and corrupt Palestinian officials reached a boiling point and a second *Intifada* broke out. This *Intifada* contributed to some of the most intense suicide bombings within Israel's borders by Palestinians as well as increased accusations over corruption within the Palestinian leadership, including Yasir Arafat. Israel has since begun to unilaterally build a "security" wall separating the Israelis from the Palestinians. The security wall does not follow the pre-1967 borders and incorporates more Palestinian land into Israel and has been met with international scrutiny.

The absence of a Palestinian nation-state to create a homogenous national selfdom coupled with Palestinian dispersal across the globe, Palestinian identity exists in a state of plurality and heterogeneity, unboundedness and fluidity. Scholars have pointed to this identity being a result of the dispersal of the Palestinians in 1948. The historiography proves that Palestinian national and cultural identity is the site of overlapping forms of identity and struggle. Palestinian identity exists on a national and cultural level despite the non-existence of a nation-state of Palestine and the ambiguous positions of Palestinians throughout the world. Palestinians defend their attachment to Palestine as a tool to combat local and global forces that have attempted to assimilate, repress, manipulate and destroy this selfdom. Scholars contend that the recognized Palestinian national movement post-1970 attempted to assimilate and homogenize Palestinian identity. But the facts of overwhelming dispersal prohibit any collective identity from taking shape. As of right now, the only avenues that Palestinians have to create a common national identity and history are through local political and cultural groups, through

historiography, and oral history. As we will see in the following chapters, today the obstacles continue to exist however resources are being developed to foster connections and maintain the principles of struggle and resistance inherent to Palestinian identity.

## CHAPTER 2

### CONCEPTS OF IDENTITY AMONG PALESTINIAN-AMERICANS

On May 10, 2002, National Public Radio (NPR) aired a segment during its program, *All Things Considered*, profiling Palestinian-American reactions to events in the Middle East. Reporter Barbara Bradley had traveled to Falls Church, Virginia, and interviewed eleven Palestinian Americans while they gathered at Samedi Sweets, a café located at a strip mall in the northern part of the state. According to Bradley, the atmosphere in the café at the time of her interviews was thick with water pipe tobacco smoke and charged with intense political discourse.<sup>69</sup>

The opening topic of discussion focused on the recent visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon to the United States. Unsurprisingly, the Palestinians in the café criticized the Prime Minister's visit, declaring Sharon's calls for peace in Israel/Palestine, "a deceiving visit," and, "the worst joke I ever heard in my life, because his hands are very bloody, and he's still killing."<sup>70</sup> The topics of discussion among the Palestinians in the café that day continued to focus on politics, the dire situation within the Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the frustration felt by Palestinian American students who had participated in protests and rallies in Washington DC during 2002. The students had demanded an end to American unreserved political support for Israeli actions in the occupied territories.

The most politically charged assertion during the segment came from eighteen-year-old Jahad Ali, a high school senior in Virginia. He described his anger and frustration at the increasing violence inflicted upon the Palestinians by the Israelis. Jahad depicted his outrage by

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<sup>69</sup> Barbara Bradley, "Palestinians in America: Palestinian American Reactions to Events in the Middle East," National Public Radio's *All Things Considered*, 10 May 2002.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., Unidentified Man #1 and #2.

stating, “You just—your blood boils, and there’s no way for you to release that energy.” Jihad’s sentiments grew more eye-opening when Bradley, Jihad’s father, and Jihad’s mother analyzed the young man’s disposition. It is worth quoting at length:<sup>71</sup>

**Bradley:** But taking the long view isn’t much in vogue right now, even among middle-class Palestinian Americans. Eighteen-year-old Jihad Ali says if he weren’t living in suburban Virginia, he would probably be a suicide bomber.

**Jihad:** It doesn’t make a difference who dies, just as long as they’re Israeli, ‘cause if they’re with killing the Palestinians, then I’m with killing the Israelis.

**Jeanine** (Jihad’s mother): See what the IDF (Israeli Defense Force) has done to my little boy? They’ve made him violent and hate them. They’ve made my son grow up too fast.

**Bradley:** Back at Samedi Sweets Café, Jihad’s father says his son is growing fast, but he’s growing into a man. And he says if his son wants to go to Israel and be a suicide bomber, he wouldn’t stop him.

**Mr. Ali Ali** (Jihad’s father): If his time has come, he will die, regardless of where he is. But at least he will die for a cause. I will live the rest of my life being proud of him.

Following the release of this segment on *All Things Considered*, Linda Chavez, President of the Center for Equal Opportunity in Washington DC and political analyst for FOX News Channel, responded on May 14, 2002 with a spirited criticism of the program with a column on Townhall.com entitled, “Cheering for the Suicide Bombers in Virginia.” Chavez argued that to understand the dangers posed by capitulation to multiculturalism to the future of the United States, one does not need to look further than the comments made by the Palestinian-Americans on the *All Things Considered* program.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Transcription provided by NPR at [www.npr.org](http://www.npr.org).

<sup>72</sup> Linda Chavez, “Cheering for the Suicide Bombers in Virginia,” 14 May 2002; available from <http://www.townhall.com>; World Wide Web.

Chavez's response to the radio segment focused on identifying these Palestinians as the antithesis of American values that she regarded should take precedence over immigrants' allegiance to their ethnic group. In the article she stated:

These sentiments are shocking coming from American citizens...These Palestinian Americans are expressing views one doesn't expect to find outside the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade or among its sympathizers. They express a contempt for the rule of law and an allegiance to an extremist, foreign ideology.<sup>73</sup>

In comparison to contemporary immigrants and their children, namely Palestinian-Americans, Chavez romanticized that former American immigrants set aside their ethnic animosities and allegiances in order to assimilate into American culture and adhere to "democratic values." From Chavez's perspective, the Palestinians in Falls Church represented imposter Americans symbolizing the contemporary need for a reexamination of yielding to multiculturalism in the United States.

Chavez's sensationalist supposition of what few forms of thought and behavior constitute the American way of life fits neatly into the contrived idea of the restoration of "the American lifestyle" in the context of America post-September 11, 2001. After September 11, 2001, American leaders deliberately challenged what they deemed to be domestic dissent towards American foreign policy and unpatriotic qualities. The growing acceptance of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity within American society, an ideal fought for during the social movements of the 1960 and 1970s, was met with glaring criticism and suspicion after 9/11. Chavez's condescending inclination towards Palestinian-Americans represented but one facet of the movement to locate the identification "American" as a stable, fixed selfhood rooted in a romantic ideal of European, namely English and white, descent.

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

The particular discourse that deems dissent in matters of governance and foreign policy as unpatriotic and unsavory has continuously existed in the United States and has been termed “imperative patriotism” by scholar Steven Salaite.<sup>74</sup> Salaite contends that imperative patriotism is most common in settler societies historically, such as the United States, where conformity among settlers is essential in cases of interaction with indigenous peoples. The juridical mentality needed to rationalize occupying indigenous land is vital to the survival of settler society. While imperative patriotism functions at the level of discourse, it generates its strength from the dominate codes of morality. Salaite argues that imperative patriotism manifests itself during times of wartime or domestic unrest and is directly related to xenophobia.<sup>75</sup> Arab-Americans had historically been subjected to racism in the United States before 9/11, especially in the popular media outlets and Hollywood productions.<sup>76</sup> The events of 2001 made common Americans confront the issues of foreign policy, civil liberties, and multiculturalism that had been muted or ignored.<sup>77</sup>

9/11 provided the decisive moment when Arab-Americans evolved from a marginally invisible to glaringly distinct social entity targeted by imperative patriotic rhetoric. Prior to 9/11, the Arab-American community of roughly 3.5 million people existed largely as “the invisible racial/ethnic group” of the United States.<sup>78</sup> The limited existing scholarship on Arab-Americans before 9/11 underscored the community’s peripheral position in American society, but after 9/11

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<sup>74</sup> Steven Salaite, “Ethnic Identity and Imperative Patriotism: Arab Americans Before and After 9/11,” *College Literature* Vol. 32 Issue 2 (Spring 2005), 154.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>76</sup> See the work, *Cultural diversity and the U.S. Media*, eds. Yahya Kamalipour and Theresa Carilli (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

<sup>77</sup> Salaite, 158.

<sup>78</sup> Nadine Naber, “Ambiguous Insiders: An Investigation of Arab American Invisibility,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 23 no. 1(2000): 37. The population of Arab-Americans is a figure estimated by the Arab-American Institute, 2000; [www.aaiusa.org](http://www.aaiusa.org).



politicians and the mainstream American public were eagerly curious to learn about the people who, many Americans felt had decisively reshaped their lives.

The scholarship that existed prior to 9/11 emphasized that before the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Arab-Americans tended to assimilate into American society while maintaining cultural features in the home such as food, child rearing, family ties, and the language of their region.<sup>79</sup> After 1967, Arab immigrants to the United States maintained a sense of ethnic nationalism kindled by what Arabs viewed as Arab dispossession in the Middle East by Israel in particular and the West generally. In regards to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Iraq Wars, American international relations have played a prominent role in the formation of Arab-American identity. By the late 1990s, Arab consciousness existed strongly among Arab immigrants and their U.S.-born children, who were rapidly expressing these tangible rallying cries to foster their political ambitions.<sup>80</sup> The political and social sentiments of the Arab-American community were met with outright slander, dismissal, or no attention at all leading to ambivalence and suspicion of great magnitude among Arab-Americans after 9/11 toward mainstream society.

It is far from correct or responsible to assume a homogeneous Arab-American community even while American mainstream forces amalgamated the community. There are over twenty national backgrounds, a multitude of linguistic dialects, numerous religions, and unique histories that make up this community of people. Salaita argued that 9/11 provided a commonality among Arab-Americans more than any other event.<sup>81</sup> The cataclysmic event of 9/11 shifted the Arab-American position in American society into a paradoxical state. The legislative measures passed in the USA Patriot Act (2002) undermined any attempts to foster

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<sup>79</sup>This point is made by Salaita, 149. He points to the works of Michael Suleiman, Alixa Naff, Eric Hooglund, Nabeel Abraham and Nadine Naber whose works support this claim.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 151.

Arab-American inclusiveness and normalcy in mainstream American society. Some leaders of the Arab-American community feared to speak out against these harassing policies out of concern of being hassled or arrested. Any opposition to the war on terror or US support of Israel was also deemed as a viable cause for suspicion.<sup>82</sup> The predicament that Arab-Americans found themselves in enforced the contradictory position the community had to deal with in relation to their identity as Americans and as Arabs. Salaita pointed out that poems, short stories, and essays by Arab-Americans since 9/11 have articulated constant themes of feeling, “closer to the American polity and concurrently isolated from it.”<sup>83</sup> The apparent ambiguity of Arab-American identity in the United States constitutes an important factor when considering the challenges the community faces in the context of America post-September 11. However, it is imperative not to oversimplify this community because its subgroups possess distinctive national, linguistic, and religious characteristics as well as holding their very own unique histories.

While scholars argue the events of 2001 have generally produced ambivalent attitudes in Arab-Americans, this ambivalence in defining identity and positioning was already evident among Palestinians prior to 9/11. I will discuss in this chapter the ambiguities in Palestinian-American identity evident from interviews I conducted between September and December, 2005. The root of these ambiguous identities can be traced to the historical impact of 1948 and the subsequent trajectory of individual Palestinians across the globe. Palestinian-Americans represent one facet of the greater historical trajectory of Palestine and its peoples and can not be examined without analyzing global, national, and local factors. Palestinian identity and national consciousness exists as a transnational and global phenomenon that has emerged over the last century in the absence of a nation-state. Literature on the formation of national identities has

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<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 153.

provided a wealth of theoretical material that can be applied to the Palestinian case. However, at the same time, dealing with Palestinian history within the context of these studies on national identity and the formation of the nation is not always applicable in many instances. As Rashid Khalidi stated, “Palestinian national identity continues to unfold and reconfigure itself under the impact of a cascade of startling events and powerful historical forces which have changed the Middle East almost beyond recognition.”<sup>84</sup>

Diaspora since 1948 has proved to be a powerful historical force. I would argue that the largest obstacle to writing about Palestinians collectively is the fact that of the estimated global population of 9 million Palestinians in 2003, half live outside of traditional Palestine.<sup>85</sup>

Palestinians live on six continents and carry over a hundred passports. These circumstances make it difficult to generalize on the Palestinian experience, their collective history, and pin down a national identity because Palestinians inhabit all corners of the globe. In addition, the lack of infrastructure and sources of empirical data historians typically rely on when researching provides another hurdle in studying Palestinians. The absence of national archives, well-entrenched educational institutions, and a critical mass of intellectuals are a few of the shortcomings researchers have to deal with.

My findings indicate that interviewees are stubbornly attached to their sense of Palestinian national and cultural identity. However, these attachments took different forms. In one respect, national identity meant opposition to Zionism and imperialism. On another, it was opposition but at times acquiescence to the consolidating and unifying version of official history the present Palestinian leadership constructs. Palestinian officials and intellectual elites have

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<sup>84</sup> Rashid Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), x.

<sup>85</sup> Figure provided by PASSIA: Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, Jerusalem, 2003; [www.passia.org](http://www.passia.org).

attempted to assert a common history of Palestinian experience by writing official narratives to consolidate their hegemony over the national and social movements. Concurrently, this official Palestinian version acts against the Israelis apparatuses that deny or repress Palestinian history, but the official narratives at times ignore or downplay individual Palestinian experience. These factors combined with diaspora have contributed to the ambiguousness among Palestinians concerning their own identity. In this sense, difference and diversity is both embraced and shunned. Culturally, Palestinian-American identity overlaps attachment to Islamic identity, Arab identity, and local identities making it harder for interviewees to express an exclusive Palestinian self. This adds to what I see as the common factor of all Palestinian identity: plurality and heterogeneity; unboundedness and fluidity.

9/11 played a role in perplexing an already dynamic and intricate identity among Palestinian-Americans. On the one hand, pressure and harassment upon Palestinian political clubs and members resulted in the breakup of these organizations. In addition, some informants expressed their desire to play down their Palestinian cultural heritage by choosing to be known in public by an American name. But some saw this as an opportunity to grasp the attention afforded to them and play up their Palestinian identity and national aspirations because as they termed it, finally American society was paying attention. But while difference exists in how Palestinian-Americans identify with their ethnicity, in the interviews all the interviewees were adamant that they possessed national and cultural identities as Palestinians. This factor contributes to what I argue represents a weapon to be used in the struggle to development and maintain identity as Palestinians, though difficult it is to pin down a collective self.

## Cultural Identity as a Tool for Liberation

Palestinian-American identity construction in the twenty-first century forms part of the larger struggle of formerly colonized peoples attempting to unify, resurrect, and maintain dignity through indigenous cultural assertion. In the twentieth century, anti-colonial struggles in Africa, Asia, and Latin America incorporated many different tactics and practicalities in efforts to establish resistance movements and obtain independence from oppressive colonizers. Violence and military strategy, as in the Algerian War (1954-1962), served during the last century as the vanguard in the liberation movements. Violence as a tool of resistance is flawed however, because the system of colonization utilized violence in efforts to institute its will and ideologies over colonized peoples. Incorporating violence to resist colonial rule negates the morality of the liberation movement because it duplicates the colonial system it wishes to replace.

Amilcar Cabral (1924-1973), an engineer, writer, and African nationalist from Guinea-Bissau, led liberal struggles in Africa during the middle of the twentieth century. As secretary-general of the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC), beginning in 1962, Cabral guided the people of Guinea-Bissau in the armed liberation struggle against the Portuguese who were backed by Spain, NATO, the United States, and South Africa. In this struggle, the PAIGC defeated the vastly superior Portuguese colonial forces and its allies in an improbable victory against overwhelming odds. While Cabral's leadership in the armed movement proved to be most important for Africans, this study utilizes his theory that cultural identity serves as a central and essential component of the liberation process.

Cabral argued that liberation could not be considered solely along political lines because of "the effects of imperial domination on the social structure and historical processes of our

peoples.”<sup>86</sup> Culture thus symbolized and constituted the product of a people’s history. In addition, Cabral defended his position on liberation by stating in a later work that while imperial domination seeks to understand indigenous cultures in order to manipulate, repress, and destroy them, the colonized people:

...continue to resist culturally even when their politico-military resistance is destroyed. It is also the result of the effectiveness of cultural resistance of the people, who when they are subjected to political domination and economic exploitation find that their own culture acts as a bulwark in preserving their identity.<sup>87</sup>

Identity along these lines perseveres and operates as a constant form of resistance, passive or otherwise. Culture and identity together, serve as the foundations upon which agency can be wielded by the formerly colonized peoples.

Palestinian identity represents resistance to physical colonization and elimination of all signs of indigenous life in Palestine before 1948 by the nation/state of Israel. Palestinian identity distinguishes itself through struggle to defend and uphold cultural characteristics and national ambitions since there is no aid of an independent nation/state. Palestinians embrace the hope that a solution to their national dilemma will be gained. These characteristics of identity can be found among Palestinians globally. Khalidi argued the crushing failures that saturate Palestinian historical experiences have been surmounted and survived, giving rise to an identity of failure as triumph or “heroic perseverance against impossible odds.”<sup>88</sup> According to Khalidi, this narrative began during the British Mandate period of 1917-1948, continued during the PLO movements in the 1960s and has reached its pinnacle in contemporary times. While Palestinian identity

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<sup>86</sup> Amílcar Cabral, *Revolution in Guinea: An African People’s Struggle* (London: Stage 1 Press, 1969), 81.

<sup>87</sup> Cabral, *Return to the Source: Selected Speeches by Amílcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press with Africa Information Service, 1973), 61.

<sup>88</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity*, 194-195.

harbors itself in national ambitions, its content historically has also been couched in the Islamist movement. Musa Budeiri argues that:

The explanation lies in the nature of the Islamic movement itself. It has always preoccupied itself with the political sphere. Right from the start it endowed the nationalist struggle with its language and imagery, making it possible for people who were neither religious nor devout to enter its ranks and shelter under its banner while continuing to pursue an agenda firmly rooted in the nationalist struggles of a postreligious age.<sup>89</sup>

Taking these factors into consideration, Palestinian identity serves as the fulcrum of agency against which diaspora and outside or colonizing forces have actively or passively attempted to destroy, manipulate, repress, and/or assimilate it. Identity as Palestinians exists as an identifiable conscious selfhood among my small sampling of informants regardless of age, gender, class, or personal history. Palestinianness serves as a constant in an environment of oppressive changes and uncertain futures, a sort of “shout in the dark.” Although sometimes it has been at times inconvenient, Palestinian-Americans remain stubbornly attached to it. Palestinians have yet to achieve independence, statehood, or self-determination. Today, their feeble parastate and governing power, the Palestinian Authority, has limited powers that the Israelis virtually control. In spite of the diaspora, occupation, poverty, two *Intifadas*, the Wall, and the international community withholding its financial support of the Palestinian Authority, a strong and diverse sense of cultural and national identity continues to be developed, maintained, and evolved.

Jamaal and Kaiser: “A Weird Conflict”<sup>90</sup>

I first met Jamaal and Kaiser in Raleigh, North Carolina in December, 2005. Their friend Nasser, whom I had interviewed weeks before, set up the meeting. My first impression of

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<sup>89</sup> Musa Budeiri, “The Palestinians: Tensions between Nationalist and Religious Identities,” in *Rethinking Nationalism in the Arab Middle East* eds. Israel Gershoni and James Jankowski (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 206.

<sup>90</sup> After some interviewees expressed individual concerns over using their entire name, the author has chosen to withhold the last name of all the interviewees.

them was that they spoke English very well. Up to that point, everyone I had interviewed had immigrated to the United States from the Middle East, with English as their second or third language. Jamaal and Kaisser had both been born during the 1970s in the United States to parents who had emigrated from the Middle East. Both had graduated from respectable universities. Jamaal married Kaisser's sister in 1998; They have two children, a 3 year old daughter and a 2 year old son. I began the interview asking Jamaal about why he agreed to interview and eased into questions about his identity as a Palestinian-American.

*I want to help anyone that is doing anything remotely discussing Palestine. I want to give as much information truth or whatever that I can. I feel like I owe something to the people in any way. I feel like most Palestinians that live here and were born here feel like they owe something back. It is really weird being Palestinian because like every year that I age I keep thinking there are Palestinians all over the world naturally like there are Americans that live in Russia and Germany and everywhere but to be Palestinian to me is such a weird conflict. Palestine is the only country that doesn't exist. The only other place is like the Kurds, they have their culture and ethnicity but have never had a Kurdistan but they're fighting for one. We had a Palestine and it was taken from us and it doesn't exist in the eyes of the world so you feel displaced no matter where you are. It is always in your mind or your heart. It is really weird. It is really sad. There are a lot of people that are adamant that if me or Nasser or any other Palestinian who cares to say Palestine, there are people who say don't you mean Jordan just as a smack on the face.<sup>91</sup>*

Jamaal's articulation of his identity as both a Palestinian and an American showed that he felt situated in a privileged position because of his duality of having Palestinian roots within an American environment. The ambivalence of his identity, common among my informants, is evident in the following.

*...I feel like since I was born in America I am more likely to be open-minded than a Palestinian born in Palestine. Well, I have a tendency to say, ok Jamaal, when you think about this issue put aside the fact that you are Palestinian and American, just pretend you are a human being and how do you look at the situation. I feel like being Palestinian has helped me to be more open minded and judge more carefully if I judge at all.*

*...What do I classify myself first as? I would say Palestinian and then American. I love America but in a unique way. America is a place where we have the chance to survive a little bit longer. We have a chance to make something of ourselves and overall, the*

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<sup>91</sup> Jamaal, interview by author, digital recording, Raleigh, NC, 1 December 2005.



*average citizen is a good person. I am happy to be in America and have the opportunity to marry and have children and not worry about them getting shot up depending on what area you are and other times I think I can not believe I am living in the country that supports the people that kill my people. So this struggle is always, I try to find the good but there is always going to be some bad but as you age you learn to either find the good and try to become more positive or you slowly become more hateful I guess which I find in the older generations. I know that with the older my father gets the more mad he gets with American policy and Israeli policy. With age you know you are going to die and you give up. My wife's mother's side of the family most of them live in Gaza. That is pretty much like a prison. A lot of people that live there, I went there six years ago, you could feel the strangulation and see it in the people's faces.*

Jamaal was extremely forthcoming with his personal feelings towards being Palestinian and what he felt bound Palestinians around the world. Jamaal believed that his identity as a Palestinian promoted “otherness” among his peers growing up. While in some cases he felt alienated, he argued that this alienation and difference solidified his affection toward his cultural roots. Jamaal’s testimony is valuable here because it emphasizes difference and at the end acknowledges that some Palestinians have chosen to downplay their attachment to Palestinian identity.

*...Don't you think that most of the pride you have of being Palestinian comes from yourself? I think a lot of that comes subconsciously from knowing that our people suffer and continue to suffer and knowing that we will never be accepted as fully American by the normal American person. In my experience when I had no cousins around me I faced a lot of hatred. Your name is different. Most of my friends were ethnic people, Latino, Black, a couple white friends but I was always made to be pointed at and looked at different so I think that indirectly forced me to become who I was and have more pride in who I was. A lot of people cower and want to forget that they are Palestinian and become more Americanized or they are pushed in the opposite direction.*

Kaiser spoke about the struggle to maintain a sense of Palestinian identity in the United States and how forms of resistance as he perceives have changed through time. Resistance is a key component of Palestinianness. Kaiser’s point about its unfixed characteristics is important to note considering the dynamic nature of its ideals.

*...I think that a lot of young Palestinians are realizing that a lot of us are proud that there is a struggle this day in time and it is some kind of fighting even though we don't, I*

*don't think most Palestinians are like aah death yeah, its just like you kill our people we're going to protect ourselves and defend ourselves if that means killing you. But I think the trend is more like now we're seeing that you can't fight helicopters, and fight a country that is being supported by the biggest power in the world, America. I see a trend that is more political movement. Our generation believes the struggle can not be won with arms and violence. The previous generation, they might have, but we look back and see it didn't work.*<sup>92</sup>

Compared to Jihad from the NPR program above, Kaiser articulated struggle and resistance, central to Palestinian identity, differently. His assertion shows difference exists not only along individual lines, but along generational lines as well. Historians have emphasized the differences between the generation of Palestinians that were born before and after 1948. The generation born after 1948 viewed the older generations as weak and incompetent because they allowed al-Nakba to occur. In an effort to avenge al-Nakba, this younger generation waged violent resistance against the Israelis in the 1970s and 1980s. Kaiser's opinion reveals that another generational gap is prevalent today. Armed resistance utilized by his parent's generation has not worked. Today, young people like Kaiser want to utilize political apparatuses to solve their struggle.

Zahira: "Keep it Going"

As with Jamaal and Kaiser, our mutual friend Nasser arranged a meeting with Zahira. Zahira was born in 1951 and grew up on the West Bank in Nablus, Palestine. Her father worked for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Zahira obtained an Accounting degree from a girl's college in Nablus before marrying and coming with her husband to the United States in 1971. Zahira's husband and his family had come to the U.S. early in the 1950s. In 1977, Zahira and her husband moved to Raleigh, NC and became only one of three families of Palestinians in the area at that time. Since then, Zahira and her family have participated in the establishment of the Union of Palestinian Students at North Carolina State University and the

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<sup>92</sup> Kaiser, interviewed by author, digital recorder, Raleigh, NC, 1 December 2005.

Union of Palestinian and American Women. Zahira herself was president of the Union of Palestinian and American Women until it dissolved after September 11, 2001. The interview, recorded in December, 2005, began with Zahira discussing how Palestinian identity has changed since she arrived in the United States.

*Back then, people did not think of Palestine like we do now. Like my kids now they know Palestine as the back of their hand, like they know America. But back then, it wasn't on their minds all the time. My husbands used to go to the demonstrations about Palestine or the war but they were not as connected as me being living there or the people now connected to Palestine. When they came here, those the age of my father-in-law's age, they used to be shy to say they were from Palestine. If you asked them and they said Palestine and you say Pakistani, they say yeah, yeah, yeah. They would not expect you to know it is not Pakistan but Palestine like we do now. I went to the dentist yesterday and she asked me where I was from and I said Palestine and she said where is that at. I said the Middle East, she said Pakistan, and I said no. She didn't know where in the Middle East, and I said Iraq where the war is now, beside it in that area. I did not let it go with Pakistan and get it over with but their age in the 60s and the 50s, they did not emphasize it on Palestine. And they did not do anything to help Palestine.<sup>93</sup>*

From above, Zahira articulates difference along generational lines as well. I followed that up by asking her why there has been a change.

*The younger generation is more aware. Not like my father in law, they are not educated when they came here. And they came here to improve their kind of living, their way of living. All they were worried about was making money to send back home. They would not sit with someone who was educated they would sit all their friends together. So it was nothing new to them. They did not mingle and see what they could do to help the country. I don't know. I think it is education, it is ignorance. They took the easy way out. It is very important because if you don't remember you are Palestinian first its going to go. If I didn't remember and my kids didn't remember than the end is near. But we have to keep it going. If we want it to keep going and to resist we have to keep it going in ourselves or else it is not going to be.*

*...We are stubborn for our rights. When we have a right we fight for it. There are some that gave up like my father-in-law. The people now are stubborn and educated. We don't wait for things to come to us, we go for it.*

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<sup>93</sup> Zahira, interviewed by author, digital recorder, Raleigh, NC, 2 December 2005.

As noted above, transmission of Palestinianness through generations is crucial to uphold and continue this identity. I queried Zahira on how she and her husband attempted to instill this identity into their four children while living in the United States.

*By going home and let them see the Jews and let them see how they treat us at the airports because my kids have many experiences with the Jews. When Laura was about 2 or 3 years, we went to Lud airport and you know we're Palestinian and they hassle us a lot and keep us in line a lot and search us and give us a hard time. You know kids; she didn't want to stay still. She kept moving and one of the soldiers said you better carry her or we'll shoot her. "How can I stop her when you are searching me." And I had it up to here and I said, "go ahead and shoot her." Another soldier came up and took Laura's hand and said to stay beside your mom. That was the experience. The other experience when Ronda was 11 and Laura was 9 we had friends going back home and at that time I could not go back because I was sick. We sent them with our friends. When they got to Tel Aviv they would let them in. They spent the night in Tel Aviv and go back to America. They spent the night in Paris by themselves. 11 and 9 and our friends had one more she was maybe 12. They spent one night in Paris and came back to the United States. By this you instill, they know what the people are going and when we go back home and they see the soldiers. So that's how my kids came to Palestine. You know what the Palestinian goes through, no body knows what we go through with the occupation and we struggle to survive and we want to keep it going.*

Besides these experiences, I queried Zahira on specific methods she used in the United States.

*...When we sit down as a family. When we sit for dinner and we have the news going on and they bring something up about the news and we discussed it and they would ask, why why? We did not discard anything. I told them about my stories and of course when they went back home my dad told them about the stories. He took them to the occupied territories of 1948 and we took them to every city so they would know the whole country. That's why they are very connected to the country and they are very proud to be Palestinians too.*

The next two points highlight how Zahira defined her own struggle as a Palestinian. As the interview shows, she was adamant to develop and maintain that sense of attachment to Palestine in herself and her children. This shows the lengths to which she went to continue her own resistance and foster that resistance within her kids. As the second paragraph shows, Zahira claims the sense of struggle and resistance has been maintained in her oldest daughter.

*...They went to Garner Senior High, first at the library they didn't have the Palestinian flag. I went and put the Palestinian flag in the library. We were asking them for Palestinian books and things and we wanted to do a project on Palestine, the girls wanted to. They didn't have it in the school system. I bought one in every school. I don't know if they still have it or not. We made sure that when every one of them was in school that the school knows that they are Palestinian and there is a Palestine and it exists and it is the Palestinian people and we are the best people. I don't mean to be but I wanted to show them that there is truth. If anyone were to hear about Palestinians they might think we're riding camels and we're living in the refugee camps and we don't know anything but all the kids, their teachers knew that they were Palestinian and they proved themselves, alhamdulillah [praise to God].*

*...Being there and helping their people is the most resistance to the occupation. The occupation doesn't want us to go home. They want us to be scattered all around. That's what my older daughter; she went there to help her people. She has been hassled and everything. She came back. She wanted to make money and help them more with sending money than me being there. We can not stay. We do not have identity cards they can not stay there. They have three months and have to come back. But being there is the most resistance if they allow it. Sometimes they don't, they give us two weeks. If you stay long they won't allow you to come back. Resisting is being there and hopefully we will get there.*

Finally, I asked Zahira if she had experienced any change in the social environment after September 11, 2001. She replied that pressure from mainstream America and fear of being hassled or harassed for being Palestinian or Arab had a great effect on the Palestinian community's involvement and outreach within the Raleigh area. Zahira expressed concern that Palestinians might downplay their national and culture identity to alleviate or avoid harassment. These actions constituted a national dilemma because without expressing their Palestinian identity, does Palestine exist?

*Yes, after September 11 I think it is going down. We used to be very strong and we wanted you to know that we are Palestinian and we are great. Now we have some people who are scared to say they are Palestinian because they don't want to be known as terrorists. And they don't want to be hassled. We had a booming time in the 1990s. We used to get together and we had the will power to prove ourselves as Palestinians. But now I am afraid that it is going down. Like the Union of Palestinian and American Woman, it dissolved because of the talks between the PLO and the Israelis. We didn't know where we were going and we didn't have any more information. I said I was going to call my people. Nothing was clear so we dissolved that. Even the social clubs*

*dissolved because people are scared. People are scared to get together and do something because may they would be tied to the terrorists or doing something. I had problems with that. I was the president of the Union of Palestinian and American Woman and a member of the United Holy Land Fund and my husband was the president of the United Holy Land Fund. The United Holy Land Fund is still going on now. It's a social, not political. We do fundraising to help Palestinian people here or overseas. We used to collect funds for our people overseas and because of that we were stopped at the airport when I was going overseas to Jordan. We were stopped and hassled like you don't want to know. They were asking questions like we were terrorists. They searched everything. They broke the bags. They hassled us because we were working with the United Holy Land Fund and the Union of Palestinians. So that's why people now days say no, no, no. I don't want to do anything because I don't want to be hassled. That's why I am scared that we are going backwards. Every time I go back and forth they give me hassle until I went to Congressman Price and he wrote a letter and did everything and now I'm off their list. But still I'm on the list for American Airlines. I can not get it. Every time I go they have to search me and body search me and everything. You wonder why people aren't doing it anymore. It's because of this. They're scared.*

Zahira's sentiments concerning the reaction of Palestinians after September 11, 2001 shows that she feels the commonalities amongst the group will dissolve further because of the American mainstream backlash. This feeling is problematic considering that Palestinian identity is inherently diverse and increasingly individualized. This point proves that a rift exists between Palestinians over individual and collective identity. 9/11 magnified this split. Once again, collective identity is difficult to articulate in light of the historical experiences and present-day realities of Palestinians in the United States and globally.

#### Nasser and Hamad: "Still Fighting"

I met Nasser in an Arab grocery store in Raleigh by chance in November, 2005. He and his roommate, Hamad, had me over to their apartment right after we met. Nasser was born in 1970 in Jordan and grew up in its capital city, Amman. His parents had been expelled from their home in Haifa in 1948 during al-Nakba. Nasser attended the University of Jordan and came to the United States in 1995 to get his Ph.D. in Nutrition from North Carolina State University. He had served as the President of the Union of Palestinian Students at the university and is well

respected among the Palestinian community for his political and social activism. Hamad, who joined our conversation halfway through, grew up in Egypt and the United States. His parents were raised in Egypt after his grandparents had emigrated there from Palestine during the 1940s. He also graduated from North Carolina State University. Nasser and Hamad are both passionately active as Palestinians and very proud of their identities as such. I began the interview by asking Nasser what distinguishing characteristics Palestinians as a community and individuals possessed and about their own identity as Palestinians growing up outside of Palestine.

*My dialect. That was one thing that I learned and I wanted to keep and I am still fighting to keep. I could speak one hundred tongues but I choose to speak my mother tongue. That is one of the things that grew up with me. In the other situations, I was in a sense given the Palestinian blood in a bottle if you could say that. I lived it every single day of my life, every hour, every moment. I always introduce myself as Palestinian although legally I am Jordanian. It just comes out as Palestinian.*<sup>94</sup>

*...My parents did not choose to immigrate from Palestine to go somewhere else. If they had chosen to immigrate to the United States for instance in 1945, although the clashes had already started I would consider myself an American of Palestinian descent or to Jordan, a Jordanian of Palestinian descent. But them being forced out means that they did not lose their identity. They were pushed out. So they can't lose it. That is how I define myself as a Palestinian.*

After Hamad came in, he answered my question on where commonality exists among Palestinians.

*Palestinians share for the hope of peace. And defining peace from the Palestinian perspective, it is lack of violence and lack of occupation. We choose especially someone who has a little bit of education, when you study as a Muslim, in a sense, you have to be Jewish, Christian, and then Muslim. You can't just be a Muslim. You have to learn both religions before yours in a sense. So we can't denounce Judaism, we can't denounce Christianity. We can't use this terminology at all. You are allowed to denounce the occupiers, allowed to denounce anyone that interferes on your entity and your existence. You can not denounce the religion, just the people.*

*...They (Palestinians) have more reasons not to be united, the Palestinians, than to be united. There are different ethnicities, looks, cultures, religions. But although we have*

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<sup>94</sup> Nasser and Hamad, interviewed by author, digital recording, Raleigh, NC, 23 November 2005.

*everything going against Palestinians what unites them and what defines them is, the cliché that Dr. Said and the others call it is the struggle. But I think their commonality is starting to disappear. The only thing to unite us is hope. Hope to be able to as our grandparents to return one day. One by one it is starting to disappear. What is remaining is the remnants of the hope. Everyone is living it. The only time you see tears in the eyes of people in the mosque is when people say may we all return and meet in Palestine. It sounds like cliché and I almost have tears in my eyes and I've never been to Palestine. That is what Palestinians tell to each other. Arafat used to say, hopefully we'll pray in Jerusalem.*

*...Nasser: The Palestinians are the people that just want to live. That is what Palestinian is, hope and living.*

As the discussion continued, the theme of hope and return kept recurring. The possibility and problems of return have been examined by scholars and have concluded that while return remains a principle theme in Palestinian identity, it has become a complicated and debated issue among Palestinians. In this interview, this debate emerged as well.<sup>95</sup>

*...Nasser: When I was there in 1998, I felt a tie to the land although I wasn't born there, I wasn't raised there, nothing but I felt comfort. As weird as it may sound, I was among foreigners from my point of view they didn't speak my language they didn't have my culture they didn't have my religion, nothing. I still felt at home. It is that kind of tie you have with your home, your homeland. It's hard to describe. Personally I would return. We've had that discussion before and I said, I don't care if I go home naked, with no clothes on me, I don't care, I'll go and sleep on the ground. I would do it.*

*Hamad: I guarantee that you're going to get the extreme majority telling you we would go; we wouldn't care if it's called Israel or Palestine whatever it's called. We would go back.*

*Nasser: But there are some people that really don't care.*

*Hamad: But given the option, they would. I feel the same way. I would go back. I told my wife Marie, she said no you're not going to go there, and I said you're coming with me. I told her that if Palestine comes back, I'm going there.*

*Nasser: You can always find another one. Please don't tell her I said that. I am just joking.*

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<sup>95</sup> On the return process, see Julianne Hammer's, *Palestinians born in Exile: Diaspora and the Search for a Homeland* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005).



Declaring identity as Palestinians holds the utmost importance for Nasser and Hamad.

The following quote from Nasser exhibits how denial of this identity is frowned up by the community and by himself:

*In 1996, I met a girl from Lebanon. One night, she was having people over and she invited me because I got to know her. She invited everyone over to her house. One of the people invited was a guy who had an Arabic name from Jaffa. Now he spoke good English. Well, we were sitting drinking soda and beer and whatever. She goes over and asks where he was from again and he says he's an Israeli from Jaffa,, Israel. Just like that. Half of us almost dropped what we were holding. It came as a shock as if someone had really slapped us. The girl that hosted it looked at him and said excuse me don't you mean Palestinian from Jaffa. And he said no, no, no, I'm Israeli. She said oh really, would you please put the beer down and leave. I don't allow Israelis in the house, especially those who are Arab. You are defining yourself as Israeli, and she kicked him out because he did not define himself as a Palestinian and she's not even Palestinian. We all applauded her because we felt a relief. He was wrong. He could have said he was a Palestinian from Jaffa and carried an Israeli citizenship. That is totally different. But to define yourself as Israeli while Israel tells you are Israeli if you are Jewish but carrying an Israeli passport doesn't classify you as Israeli. And you are declaring yourself as Israeli. So defining yourself as Israeli, that was really wrong.*

Nasser's depiction of this occurrence is another sign of difference within Palestinian. As Kaisser noted above, some Palestinians have chosen to downplay their ethnic background.

Palestinians that remained in Israel after 1948 are seen at times as being compliant to Israeli policy and existence. If Palestinian identity is defined by diaspora, then how do Palestinians that lived within Israel proper judge and define themselves? Nasser's story above shows one instance of identity among the group of Palestinians from Israel. The next interviewee, Amjad, is another case of a Palestinian, born and raised in Israel, articulates his own identity and the problems that arise from his life experiences.

Amjad: "I did not feel Original"

I met Amjad by coincidence in October 2005 while trying to set up an interview with another Palestinian who owns the store Amjad works at in Wilmington, North Carolina. Amjad was born in 1975 in Nahariya, Israel and grew up in Acre/Akka, Israel. Amjad described his

childhood as exceptional because he was the only Arab Muslim in his Jewish school. Amjad's parents and grandparents were born in Um al-Fahem and left in 1948 during al-Nakba to end up in Acre/Akka. The opportunity to interview Amjad was important because as a Palestinian Israeli citizen, he represented clearly another dynamic of Palestinian identity. As seen in the interview with Nasser and Hamad, they view Palestinians such as Amjad as lacking true Palestinianness because of their positioning within Israeli society. Upon interviewing Amjad, I found that principles of struggle and resistance as a Palestinian does exist for him on both a cultural and national level. The interview commenced with Amjad describing his past and how he has found it difficult to locate himself as a Palestinian within Israeli society.

*In the personal terms I did not feel original because of the way I did grow up being educated in an institution that was mainly Jewish and only Hebrew on the level of culture and language and coming back home to my neighborhood where Muslim and Arab people dominate. Even though we live in coexistence, we speak Arabic and Hebrew fluently. We speak it all day long even between us. We use half the words in Hebrew because it is so common. We use Arabic and Hebrew. But for me, who am I? I am a free-minder, an independent thinker. I don't rely on anything that is Arabic original or Jewish original. I am just a person. Back to my pride being a Palestinian, thanks to you for some facts you have brought in, I feel better about being Palestinian. Seeing some losers from my country that are Israeli Jewish and seeing their pride and arrogance at the same time, I feel even more pride. A person is upon what he does and what he present and accomplish and he can be anybody. So I do feel like I am growing into a better accomplishment of knowing myself and knowing my origin better and having respect for that.*

*...We didn't have the struggle like others back there. We don't have this kind of struggle. All the Israeli people who are Arab natives, they are attending the schools and universities through the Israeli system, Jewish modified form of system. It's a global thing. Its democracy and stuff. Everyone is free to do as they want. And comments are like; sometimes they used to show pity to me, like you don't know how much you miss your people, not having the same cultural aspects by living with them and growing with them in the same city. Just living in the same society, like Arabs going to Arab schools to keep up with their heritage and their culture. We can go to a Jewish school, but you miss the Arabic speaking, the culture, and method from writing, the basic stuff. Instead of learning the Quran as a historical book, you learn Torah in Jewish school. So you miss this kind of orthodoxic learning. So it makes a person like me more unique and more*

*miserable because being one of the only ones who attend a Jewish school and trying to live with it.*<sup>96</sup>

Amjad went on to describe that he supported the first Intifada (1987-1991) and its fights against the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. During this period, Amjad described that his identity as a Palestinian was strengthened by watching news coverage of the occupation on TV and having the visual representation of who was oppressing and who was oppressed. I asked him if having that experience and others made him Palestinian.

*I would say first demographically, I was born there, I came from there. I was made from the dirt of this country in a very broad sense. That is a very little bond, but the major one I have. Further down, the struggle we have in the same country in history is another bond I have with the Palestinian people as being Palestinian. The little issues that Palestinians have themselves on how to live better and have a better life into who is a Palestinian and why he is defined as being Palestinian. So both have to be linked together and walk hand-in-hand together. That is basically it. That is the bond between me and the rest of the Palestinians. The feeling you are depressed and you are not able to do a lot. Like me today, speaking to this person from Palestine and seeing almost that he has no nation to call his country besides the United States as a nation that resemble the whole world as the freedom country with the freedom of the person. He has nothing. He has no passport, no Palestinian passport. He is not eligible for anything that will determine he is Palestinian. Others are like that and that is pretty much suffering. I am Israeli and I will be American citizen shortly and I can still go to my country and be recognized as Israeli and there is no backlash over that. It is very comforting. I can go back and forth and I can say this is my country and I am not depressed over that. I am pretty joyful. People like them from the occupied territories can not go anywhere. And when they go to their country it is not the best place to be at. Not from infrastructure, the economy, freedom of movement. It's really depressing. For those in the United States, you can't go back. There is no economic opportunity and stuff. It's really hard.*

As seen in the previous interviews, Palestinians have articulated resistance as a characteristic of identity. Amjad too describes his own resistance. While it represents a much different form than Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, it too can be seen as representative of Palestinian identity.

*...Verbally I resisted a lot. I always spoke out how I felt without the fear of being arrested or anything. But I have never physically resisted. Around 2001, the second Intifada, there was anger from the Arab Israeli natives so they went out on the street and*

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<sup>96</sup> Amjad, interviewed by author, digital recorder, Wilmington, NC, 20 November 2005.

*demonstrated. They were being faced with tremendous force from the police and army and people who were citizens, like in America who want to demonstrate his ideas or opinions, were spread with bullets and many died just because they wanted to demonstrate the aggression of their country towards the neighboring country and they got killed. One was my relative who lives back in the original home of my father. That was very regular demonstration. That is one physical act of resistance. And it wasn't actually physical. We were blocking the road or something but nothing that required the huge force of bullets that were injuring and killing these people. How would I prove that I am Palestinian? First I would say I am from Palestine. And where is that they might ask. Then I would say I am from Israel. How come you're Palestinian from Israel? I would say look back at the books from 1948 Israel was established and before that it was Palestine. It was the territory of Palestine. All the international visitors called it Palestine and recognized it. When British said we are in this region, they called it Palestine.*

Amjad experiences and identity represent another example of Palestinianness. Struggle and resistance exist in his narrative as well, constituting their importance within Palestinian identity. Compared to the Palestinian-Israeli mentioned in Nasser's interview, Amjad represents another dynamic of identity among Palestinians living in Israel.

#### Taisir: "Why Blood instead of Love?"

Taisir was the second Palestinian I interviewed when I undertook this project in September, 2005. Taisir was born in 1951 and raised in the city of Qalqilyah on the West Bank and immigrated to the United States in the 1990s. I was fascinated by his peaceful disposition and outlook on how he thinks the Palestinian situation should be solved. Taisir possessed the resilient hope that I found in all the Palestinians I interviewed and like most, talked of a return to Palestine.

*I lived four years in Jerusalem. I wish I could die there. Before I die I want to go there and die there. Not fight anyone no, just to die the easy way. You know why, because you belong to this land in Jerusalem. If you go through the narrow roads over there, you feel different. I dream to go back and live a couple days before I die. The history over there, Islam, Christianity, Jewish people. We should love each other, not hate each other. Who came here to this land before this? Yeah, Abraham came before thousands of years ago. Jesus came after that. Moses came. This guy came and this guy came. It doesn't matter. I have proof, I was born here. The land is enough for everyone who loves each other, not hate each other. Moses and Jesus and Muhammad not one of them talks about killing.*

*Yes we create this world. We are the devils at this time. Not the people who are asking and trying to disrupt the peace and the religious issues. Everything is about love, why we hate each other? No one built this thing in us from that time. We hate each other after the materialist things, the land and houses. Look to the prophets. They are talking just about love. How we go together as a unit. How we go together?<sup>97</sup>*

*...We don't want any borders between the people who are loving. Let everyone go over there and pray. It's enough. From the first day I was born to the day until this moment, I wish before I pass away, before I pass away for a peace a real peace. Ask me what the people over there I have a family over there, they are wishing, but honestly it is political, it is a political issue. It's not for anything else.*

Taisir's hope for peace between Israel and the Palestinians was one that I thought very sincere. In contrast to Palestinians who see resistance solely through violent means, Taisir advocated for harmony through embracing what he saw as the commonality between all humans ability to love.

*Believe me, this is political issue, I have a lot of friends in Tel Aviv, a lot of Jewish friends, I don't understand why we have these problems. We understand all the story. Let us stay alone in the camps out of charity. Just to live. No! I am willing to go back. Let me go back to Israel to Palestine whatever it named, just to live in peace. In a land I feel it belongs to me and I to it. Not to let me out to Lebanon, to Iraq, or Egypt cause everybody now understands the lesson. All the refugees around the world. They understood the lesson. Believe me its joking. We said tomorrow, and after tomorrow next year and then United Nations to go back when, when? After hundreds of years?*

*...It is crazy to try to fight Israel; they have more power than all the Arab countries. It's bad, to me to see our leader still playing games with us. And we know the truth. We are not in the position to go to war with Israel. I don't know, but I wish that I do not pass away before seeing the peace coming. Even one day, to that land, real peace, not fake. Because now what they are building and we hear it in the media is fake peace. Because if there is a real peace, you would not find this building, this wall. Love each other. Go together to the church to the mosque. That is freedom. It is true; I can see that real thing in this land.*

Taisir advocated for embracing differences across religion and generational divides. His own personal struggle emphasized return to Palestine, an ideal some Palestinians have given up. Taisir, like others, recognized the hopelessness of violence. His articulation of resistance took

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<sup>97</sup> Taisir interviewed by author, digital recording, Raleigh, NC, 15 September 2005.

the forms of never giving up the right to live in peace and possess freedom. Again here, identity as a Palestinian takes on a different meaning.

Yousuf: “Peace, Knowledge, and Education”<sup>98</sup>

I met Yousuf through a mutual friend at his business in Raleigh in November, 2005. Yousuf was born in 1967 in Kuwait and raised there. His parents were from Haifa and immigrated to Jordan in 1948 and moved on to Kuwait during the 1960s. Yousuf graduated in the top five percent of all Palestinian students and was allowed to enroll in Kuwait University at this end of high school. He finished his degree in engineering in four years and was offered a job with one of Kuwait’s leading construction companies in 1990. Shortly after, Saddam Hussein attacked Kuwait, sending that country into chaos and putting Yousuf out of work. Through a personal friend of his father, Yousuf secured work at a bread factory where he claims he suffered harassment from Iraqis and Kuwaitis. He migrated to the United States in the mid-1990s and started a restaurant with his brother. Unlike the other Palestinians I interviewed, Yousuf’s identity centered on being a Palestinian within the larger collectivity of Arabs and Muslims. While he showed attachment to Palestinianness, Yousuf also reasoned that claiming a localized national identity was just another divider among the larger Arab and Muslim community. I began the interview by asking Yousuf about his Palestinian identity and how growing up in Kuwait affected that.

*...I was born there. I am native Kuwaiti. That is my home, though they deprived my right to citizenship to becoming Kuwaiti. It hurts me because that is my home but what can you do? America now is my home. I don’t belong to Jordan. I feel toward Palestine but where is Palestine. I can not remember it. My dad remembers it. Kuwait is the only home for me and I can not go there. Until I have my citizenship I will not go back. I can not own land; I can not own a house. I own a house here. I can buy land here if I want it. I feel North Carolina is my home. I love it. My kids were born here. I never tell them America is not your country or North Carolina is not your home. I tell them this is your*

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<sup>98</sup> Yousuf is a pseudonym the author has chosen for this interviewee.

*country. You have roots from there and we love it, but we always say God bless America. We love North Carolina me and my brother, my brother just got his green card.*<sup>99</sup>

Yousuf then began to explain how he perceived his identity as a Palestinian among the larger Arab and Muslim community. I asked him if he believed in the idea of a Palestinian homeland and if there was a solution to the Palestinian predicament.

*Yes, of course I value the idea of homeland. Yes, I do. I think this conflict will not end. I have a lot of costumers and they ask me, are you Egyptian? Yes. Are you Lebanese? Yes. No one says Palestinian. Are you Moroccan? Yes. Honestly, if someone took Kuwait or Morocco I wouldn't say none of my business. If say I value Palestine as my homeland. What about the Kuwaitis? We have so many people in Kuwait that are resisting with no relations to Israel. I know a lot of Kuwaiti natives who have never been to Palestine, they just have Palestinian friends. What I want to say, a point that Americans really don't understand from the president to many people. Don't say, why are the Syrians coming and fighting for Iraq. Why are the Saudis coming and fighting for Iraq. Why did Qassamies come from Syria to Palestine to fight? Egypt was held by non-Egyptians until Nasser came. The big mother land is the whole land. I guarantee you that if I say I don't value the homeland to be Palestine. Well I value it, of course I value it. I value it as a moral right, a legal right. I hold this right in my hand with my refugee card. I got it this summer. I have never been to Haifa, if my father goes and will probably get lost there. There are millions behind me saying give up this right. No I won't give up this right because it is the right of everybody. This is why I tell you the conflict will never end. If you bring some Chinese to North Carolina to occupy part and make a state for them, it does not work. That is what I am trying to say. This conflict will have fuel forever. The United States is trying to pressure our Kuwaiti leaders to take Israelis as enemies out of the books, but it isn't going to work. They don't belong. This conflict will go on forever.*

I then inquired if his loyalty was more with the Arab world and Islam than with only Palestine?

*Yes. It's not just me. I am a person who reads a lot. Why is there an organization in Kuwait to resist normalization with Israel? Pakistanis and Indonesians want Jerusalem. This requires an international solution that's it. I support the recognition of Palestine. I support peaceful talks. I think the United States can help, if their neutral. But we have to put a stop to these suicide bombers. Send these people to school. Make them love life; make them go to school. If he is miserable all day long, he has no place to go, what do you expect? If give them a state, send them to school, give them a job, build factories, an infrastructure, decent life. People with a decent mind will sit down and talk about it. If this causes me to give up my refugee card, then I will do it.*

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<sup>99</sup> Yousuf, interviewed by author, digital recorder, Raleigh, NC, 2 December 2005.

*...We have the right to this land. You live in this land. You are American citizens. I want you [his children] when you grow up to use this [brain] and defend the land where your parents come from. Everything with peace, knowledge, and education. We just need one good leader. Things will be better.*

My final question to Yousuf regarded symbols that he believed represented or characterized Palestine. His answer delivered the powerful message that localized symbols divided the community in desperate need of unity. According to Yousuf, division, whether through symbols or diaspora, is a problem that needs remedy.

*...I think of the picture of the Dome of the Rock. The flag doesn't matter. It is something that divides people. I don't care where they live. A lot of people are helping the Palestinians living here. There is an identity problem with the Palestinians. Some have certificates that say stateless. Some say Kuwaiti like me or the Emirates, Qatar. It's all over the place.*

Yousuf's perspective provided an insight into another dynamic of Palestinian identity, resistance and embrace of difference. I argue that this ambivalence has been accentuated as a result of the diaspora. Once again, identity is defined by difference and plurality among some, yet Yousuf described this division as destructive. Palestinian identity once again can be seen as dynamic and unbounded, yet at times even contradictory to its own self. Yousuf reflects another overlapping layer of identity in his attachment to Islam. As Buderer argued above, because of the nature of the Islamic movement among Palestinians, Islamic identity intertwines itself with the national movement. Yousuf's articulation of his Palestinian identity with pan-Islamic rhetoric, I would argue ties into Buderer's conclusions.

## Conclusion

In his epilogue to *Memories of Revolt*, Ted Swedenburg discusses the diverse uses and symbolisms of the *kufiya* among Western subcultural groups, as a style critique, and by various political movements. The *kufiya* originated as an agricultural laborers' head covering and



Swedenburg argues it has evolved into a contemporary consumer item with diverse meanings.

He argues that the image and symbolism of *kufiyas*:

...Not only playfully reconfigure and reinvest Western histories and culture, but also corrodes Eurocentric identities. Its transnational travels also suggest that jolts of recognition and transgression sometimes shoot across national and cultural boundaries, even the divide separating the (Arab) East from the West.<sup>100</sup>

The *kufiya*'s various uses and meanings require the observer to reconfigure how one comprehends the various meanings attached to this symbol. Swedenburg argues that one can not think of the various histories that have utilized the *kufiya* as together or see them connected through equivalence, rather through "difference and dislocation, attraction and repulsion, as bound together through networks of economy, migration, information, exploitation, and violence."<sup>101</sup> Swedenburg advocates that, in order to understand these relations, one must abandon Eurocentric visions and embrace what he calls "multivision" or "multiple consciousness." One must adopt a persistent:

...bifocality, to bring such transnational linkages, repressed connections, and subterranean channels to consciousness, to make explicit the histories and the political-economic conditions that permit these journeys and connections to take place, and to disrupt official efforts to erect and maintain a cultural-geographical *cordon sanitaire*.<sup>102</sup>

The *kufiya*'s assorted uses represent the ambiguity of this garment in relation to its meaning. In a similar fashion, Palestinian identity takes on an ambiguous state because its own meanings and definitions are highly individualized and diverse. I would argue that Swedenburg's analysis of the *kufiya* can be seen as a validation of my own arguments concerning identity here.

In order to understand fully Palestinianness, one must drop the exclusive dream images of this identity and embrace the dynamic, internationalized, and ambiguous reality that has come to symbolize Palestinian identity. In order to do so, national identity must be deserted and replaced

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<sup>100</sup> Ted Swedenburg, *Memories of Revolt* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 205.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 208. *cordone sanitaire* is a reference to Michael Foucault used by here Swedenburg.

by the transnational and the individual. Among the interviewees, Palestinian identity represented an international, a national, and a local identity, while never bedding itself in one category for too long. Identity as Palestinians overlapped and intertwined with identity as Muslims, Arabs, Israelis, Americans, North Carolinians, males, females, young, and old. Identity as Palestinians can not be pinned down into a neatly compact and easily defined box because of the historical circumstances and experiences Palestinians have faced since 1948.

Palestinian identity represents individualized liberation within the contexts of transnational, national, and local circumstances. In light of the absence of an independent nation/state, oppressive occupation and negation of history by the occupiers, international diaspora, exclusive national narratives, and personal historical circumstances, a sense of Palestinian identity nevertheless exists. September 11, 2001 contributed generally to the increasing ambivalence and ambiguity of positioning and identity among Arab-Americans. Yet, Palestinians are no strangers to ambiguous positions and identity. 9/11 impacted Palestinian-Americans by adding another layer within the struggle and resistance to uphold Palestinian identity. The interviews prove that embracing diversity and difference among Palestinians is essential to analyzing this identity. At the same time, these inherent characteristics are looked down upon. This ambivalence as well characterizes Palestinian-American identity. In the absence of the nation-state, cultural and national identity among this group of informants, and the community as a whole, oscillates, flows, and breaks new ground but will never be cast away. Personal liberation, though it may serve at the collective national or personal levels, relies on the remembrance, generational transmission, and the resilience of this identity in whatever form it may take.

## CHAPTER 3

### IDENTITY AND PHOTOGRAPHS: KHALIDI'S, *BEFORE THEIR DIASPORA: A PHOTOGRAPHIC HISTORY OF PALESTINE AND PALESTINIANS, 1876-1948*

Palestinian identity exists as a national and cultural identity among Palestinians despite their relatively disparate communities and in opposition to outside forces that attempt to break any attachment to this selfhood. This identity has served as a tool for national and cultural liberation against the local and global forces associated with diaspora and occupation that have attempted to destroy, manipulate, repress, and/or assimilate these political and cultural ideologies. Identity among all Palestinians has unfolded and reconfigured itself under startling impacts and constant pressure from historical forces. Among Palestinian-Americans discussed in the previous chapter, their identity as Palestinians exists as a conscious selfhood regardless of age, gender, class, or personal history. This identity exists as a diverse, unbounded, and fluid sense of national and cultural identity. It continues to be maintained, albeit without an independent nation-state of Palestine to create a common collective national identity.

I will now focus on how visual images of Palestine prior to 1948 have created a medium not only of contesting dominate historiographical and political narratives, but also serves as a common representative tool for the dissemination and maintenance of Palestinian national and cultural identity among Palestinian-Americans. In my investigation of how national and cultural identity is constructed and maintained among Palestinian-Americans, I observed that many interviewees began citing Walid Khalidi's, *Before Their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948*, as a source in the historical record that held personal

significance.<sup>103</sup> The photographs exhibited in the book represent a legitimate and undeniable representation that Palestine and Palestinians existed as an active political and cultural historical reality prior to 1948, countering Western and Zionist claims. The interviewees' interpretations of the photographs emphasized the power of visual representations to create and disseminate various meanings, and in this case, also holding immediate political and cultural significance.

Because no nation exists, the historiography focused on Palestine and Palestinians in the modern era (1800 to the present) assumes increased importance on issues concerning political legitimacy, fundamental rights, and the very existence of Palestinians and their national history. An analysis of historical works focused on Palestine and Palestinians prior to 1948 reveals two seemingly irreconcilable dominant narratives. These are Zionist versus Palestinian nationalist, reaching conclusions that can be termed polar opposites: who has exclusive rights to the same land; backwardness versus modernity; vacancy versus occupancy. Since the 1970s, with the rise of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), there has been a concerted Palestinian effort to provide collective substance to the scholarship on the national past and memory of life in Palestine that persisted before and after 1948.<sup>104</sup> Reclaimed poetry and fiction by Palestinians in addition to historical research and scholarship on Palestinians prior to 1948 attempted to recover the history and cultural life that had diminished because of the ravages of war, dispossession, dispersal, occupation, and official denials.<sup>105</sup> These projects attempt to characterize the collective past and present of the Palestinian people, but in doing so represent a concerted effort by

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<sup>103</sup> Walid Khalidi, *Before their Diaspora: A Photographic History of the Palestinians, 1876-1948* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1984).

<sup>104</sup> Edward Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place," *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 26 no.2 (Winter, 2000): 189.

<sup>105</sup> The literary works of Zayyat, Darwish, Hussein, al-Qassem, Kanafani, and Jabra represent this effort. One such official denial was from Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir (1898-1978) in 1969, "There were no such thing as Palestinians. When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian state? It was either southern Syria before the First World War, and then it was a Palestine including Jordan. It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist." *Sunday Times, The Washington Post*, 16 June 1969.

Palestinian officials to dictate and mandate Palestinianness as a bounded identity and experience. There are multiple, competing, and compatible notions of self coexisting in Palestinian Americans. Every society produces multiple and competing notions of self. That one may be dominant, more institutionally supported, may reveal more about class, race, ethnicity, religion, and gender in that society than about the human possibilities of the self. Western psychological theory has focused on how an individual emerges as a bounded, autonomous and separate self. Such an individualized self is considered the pinnacle of maturity in this field of theory. The diversity found in Palestinian identity does not fit into the bounded theories of self.<sup>106</sup> While Palestinians celebrate this diversity and yet deplore it at times, diversity represents an enormous hurdle in defining a collective national identity.

Walid Khalidi's, *Before their Diaspora*, presents an authoritative narrative using photographic documentation which addresses the permanent presence of a vibrant and dynastic people in Palestine before 1948. Khalidi's work challenges scholarship that has often failed to consign the collective presence of Palestinians in official historical memory and record.<sup>107</sup> The book also provides seemingly indisputable evidence of an evocative collective past that had existed only as hearsay and imagination for younger generations, or as a faint memory held by the older generation suppressed by dominant official histories. Yet, Khalidi's work represents an official historical narrative that negates individual Palestinian experiences and history.

Khalidi engages a potentially larger audience with this counter-narrative because it is not laden with confusing academic jargon and because photographs provide accessible visual

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<sup>106</sup> Suad Joseph, ed., *Intimate Selving in Arab Families: Gender, Self, and Identity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999), 1-17.

<sup>107</sup> There is debate over whether or not Palestinians have an official archive. Once located in Beirut, the Institute of Palestine Studies (IPS) was sacked and its contents confiscated by the Israeli army in 1982. Since, the Institute has moved to Geneva, Switzerland. A branch of the IPS also exists in Washington D.C. See the New York Times, 20 February and 16 March 1983.

representation and normalization without the constraints of age, gender, experience, culture, politics or educational background. This characteristic of *Before their Diaspora* has aided the maintenance of Palestinian identity, politically and culturally, by ushering in what was the imaginable and making it visually tangible. For Palestinian-Americans in this study, *Before their Diaspora* represented a source of historical, political, and cultural legitimatization and a tool for transmitting national and cultural identity to younger generations, justified in legitimate historical research. By incorporating photographs, *Before their Diaspora* generates feelings of empathy and closeness because it reminds the viewer that this conflict exists between real people, with real identities, and real history.

### The Debate over Historiography

Palestinians, in spite of every obstacle that has plagued their achievement of self-determination, independence, or statehood, maintain a strong sense of national identity. This identity has not solely been determined or defined by the conflict with Zionism and Israel. It has many other aspects that each individual Palestinian, regardless of his/her position in the world, has to decide for themselves. As hard as it is to pinpoint a specific, concrete identity, more difficulty lies in defining the limits of Palestine. Probing this question, Rashid Khalidi asked:

Specifically, does it include the places on the map of the country now presumably part of Israel, even though on the Palestinian 'internal map' they will always be part of Palestine? Thus although Jaffa is today a rundown slum, a southern suburb of the Tel Aviv urban complex, with a poor, largely Arab population (and a small night life district much frequented by Israelis in old renovated Arab homes), in the Palestinian imagination it is the place of origin of all those who still proudly call themselves Jaffans.<sup>108</sup>

It is this controversy between how a place is remembered and its present representation that touches upon questions of identity, nationalism, of power, and authority.

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<sup>108</sup> Khalidi, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of a National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 205.

Edward Said argued that rapid social transformations in modern history has led to an era of a search for roots, “of people trying to discover in the collective memory of their race, religion, community, and family a past that is entirely their own, secure from the ravages of history and a turbulent time.”<sup>109</sup> According to various scholars, including Said, the process of memory as a tool to gauge social, political, and historical processes is complicated by the role of invention of tradition.<sup>110</sup> National tradition, in this sense, has been invented by social and political authorities as an instrument of rule to connect large numbers of people together when the local social bonds of village and family were breaking down.<sup>111</sup> Authorities methodically manipulated, suppressed, and elevated bits of the national past to refashion the collective memory in order to give themselves a coherent national identity and narrative.<sup>112</sup>

Along this same vein of thought, geography, as a socially constructed and maintained sense of place, finds itself actively symbolic of tradition and history. However, geography too can be manipulated, inverted, and characterized apart from its present physical reality.<sup>113</sup> In the case of Palestine, its landscape functions in the memories of Jews, Christians, and Muslims entirely differently. These memories, all emanating from the same physical place, exist mostly in conflict of one another thus intensifying the clash found in that space and yet obscuring the existential reality of what the area really is and what the area symbolizes.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Said, “Invention,” 177.

<sup>110</sup> See the work *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge, 1983); Said, “Invention,” 178.

<sup>111</sup> Hobsbawm and Ranger site this process in *Invention of Tradition* as beginning around 1850 as a process to institutionalize supposedly age-old rituals: the Scottish kilt, the Indian *darbar*, the African in need of modernization, the French peasant turned into the ideal French Republican. Tom Segev addresses this issue in *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993). Also see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999).

<sup>112</sup> Said, “Invention,” 179. Also see Rema Hammami and Salim Tamari’s article, “Virtual Returns to Jaffa,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27 no. 4 (Summer, 1998), pp. 65-79.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 180-183.

Said believed Palestine to be the ultimate portrayal of historical and geographical invention. An example of this can be seen in the significance of 1998, the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Palestinian *al-Nakba* and Israel's independence and establishment. From the Palestinian perspective, 1948 represented the catastrophe that drove out 750,000 native residents (two-thirds of the population living there), property stolen, villages destroyed, forced diaspora, and an entire society obliterated. On the other hand, the dominant Israeli narrative characterizes this date as a miraculous recovery after the horrific Holocaust in Europe, of democracy, of returning to their homeland after two millennia of diaspora, and making the desert bloom. The official historiography by 1998 had only recently begun to mention the collective historical reality of the Palestinian people and their battles over the right to a remembered presence in Palestine prior to 1948.<sup>115</sup>

The celebratory idea of Israel establishing independence and ushering in modernity in Palestine found in its official historiography negates the historical presence of indigenous Palestinians in the region in addition to implying the absence of a "civilized" people justifying settler colonialism. Historian Beshara Doumani argued:

The amazing ability to discover the land without discovering the people dovetailed neatly with early Zionist visions. In the minds of many European, especially Zionist Jews, Palestine was "empty" before the arrival of the first wave of Jewish settlers in 1881-1884. "Emptiness," of course, did not denote, except for the most ignorant, the physical absence of the native population. Rather, it meant the absence of "civilized" people, in the same sense that the Americans and Africa were portrayed as virgin territories ready for waves of pioneers. The famous Zionist slogan, "a land without a people for a people without a land was, therefore, but a manifestation of a wider European intellectual network characterized by chauvinistic nationalism, racial superiority, and imperialistic ambitions."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 184-185. See the historiography discussed in the last chapter by the "New Historians" or the "Revisionist Historians."

<sup>116</sup> Beshara Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21 no. 2 (Winter, 1992): 8.



The preeminent work that attempts to eliminate continuous Palestinian presence in Palestine and convey “emptiness” is Joan Peters’, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine*. While Peter’s work has been discredited by the academic community for its shoddy research, mangling and manipulation of documents and data, and deplorable conclusions, it typifies the extent of which historiography has played in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict over who has legitimate and moral rights to the region.<sup>117</sup> Peters argued that the Jews had been in Palestine continuously while the Palestinian Arabs had not; before Zionist settlers arrived Palestine was empty and arid; Arab immigration into Palestine during the British Mandate (1920-1948) swelled the numbers of the indigenous population; and the Palestinians were not driven out in 1948 but left on their own accord. Peters’ purported argument attempts to prove that the Palestinians as a people were an ideological, propagandistic fiction. While Peters’ critics have pronounced *From Time Immemorial* a hoax, wildly exaggerated, inconsistent, pretentious, and preposterous (among other denunciations) it is relevant to the contemporary debate about the Middle East in the West. Over the last fifty years, Western historiographies have had a major influence in how the region’s memory, geography, tradition, and history are created, reproduced, and disseminated. In the case of Israel/Palestine, historiography has been utilized to justify the present power hierarchy between the Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict over Palestine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

<sup>118</sup> Notable critiques in academic journals include: Bill Farrell, review of *From Time Immemorial*, by Joan Peters, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 14 no.1 (Autumn, 1984):126-134; Norman Finkelstein, “The scope of this fraud was huge,” *Middle East Research and Information Project Reports* No. 136/137 (Oct.-Dec., 1985), 38-40; Edward Said, “Conspiracy of Praise,” in *MERIP Reports* No. 136/137 (Oct.-Dec., 1985), 35-38 and Said, review of *From Time Immemorial*, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 15 no. 2 (Winter, 1986): 144-150; Robert Olsen, review of *From Time Immemorial*, *The American Historical Review* 90 no. 2 (April, 1985): 468-469; Ian and David Gilmour, review of *From Time Immemorial*, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 14 no. 4 (Summer, 1985): 129-141; John Ruedy, review of *From Time Immemorial*, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 no. 3 (Aug. 1987): 373-378.

Walid Khalidi's, *Before their Diaspora*, which came out the same year as *From Time Immemorial*, challenges Peters' supposition that Palestine was an empty and desolate region before Zionist immigration and activity began in 1876 to 1948. This counter-narrative demonstrated that active political and cultural life existed in Palestine and proved that disregarding the Palestinian collective presence as a distinct people and a nation violated an objective historical record. *Before their Diaspora*, published by the Institute of Palestine Studies, an independent research and publication center, may be seen as an authoritative form of national self-representation. In his preface, Khalidi admits:

A victim's obsession with the past is often the concomitant of a vengeful disposition, and protagonist have habitually complied "historical records" of their conflicts as a prelude to each other's delegitimization...the intent of this book, which it is hoped will shed some light on the Palestinians as a people in Palestine before their diaspora, and on the genesis and evolution of the Palestine problem during its formative phase. By so doing may it also foster an understanding of the Palestinian situation today and the minimal prerequisites for an honorable settlement, from the Palestinian perspective, against the background of the actual historical record.<sup>119</sup>

The work is made up of 474 black and white photographs out of about 10,000 photographs in the archives at the Institute of Palestine Studies (IPS), Beirut, but transferred to Geneva, Switzerland in 1982. Most of the photographs in the IPS collection are those of the late Wasif Jawhariyyah, a renowned Palestinian photograph collector, and the late Khalil Raad, a leading Palestinian photographer from Jerusalem. The photographs in the work are interspersed with historical summaries and chronologies but *Before Their Diaspora* is limited in its chronological and topical scope. It does not deal directly with the Zionist venture or the Palestinian/Israeli conflict in general. Khalidi is however, explicit about the political angle he is trying to portray in his work. According to the author, these factors determined the criteria for the selection of the photographs. Found in this work are predominately photographs of the

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<sup>119</sup> W. Khalidi, *Before*, 16.

impact of Zionist colonization on the Palestinian population and Palestinian responses to Zionism and the British Mandate administration.<sup>120</sup> “The photographs in this book were chosen on the basis of their relevance to its purpose and subject matter. Content took precedence over aesthetic criteria...”<sup>121</sup>

The book is structured chronologically by the principle stages of the Palestinian history before 1948: the last days of Ottoman rule (1876-1918), the period from the British occupation to the Great Palestine Rebellion (1918-1935), the Great Rebellion (1936-39), the period from the London Conference to the UN partition recommendation (1939-47), and the six months of civil war (November 1947-May 1948). Each part includes an introduction and most of the photographs include commentaries and identification of the place and/or the people in the picture. The historical introduction to Part I reached back to antiquity highlighting the historical events, religious symbolism, and social characteristics up to 1876. This depiction of a land and people full of activity is interesting considering Khalidi’s retrospective aims and a quote from Benedict Anderson’s work, *Imagined Communities*, on the importance of the past in establishing a collective national identity: “if nation-states are widely conceded to be ‘new’ and ‘historical,’ the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future.”<sup>122</sup>

Khalidi used photographs as an indexical authority to depict Palestine as a country full of political activism, economic activity, and cultural life. The indexical character of photographs encourages interpreters to treat them as objective and transparent records of reality because of photography’s mechanical origins providing it with a fundamental peculiarity and “an

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<sup>120</sup> Annelieis Moors, “Presenting Palestine’s Population Premonitions of the Nakba,” *The MIT Electronic Journal of Middle East Studies* Vol. 1 (May 2001): 15.

<sup>121</sup> W. Khalidi, *Before*, 17.

<sup>122</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, revised edition 1991), 11-12.

authenticity from which painting is barred at birth.”<sup>123</sup> In the photographic medium, there is less of an obvious gap between the signifier and the signified than with non-photographic media. While representation must be considered in viewing Khalidi’s work, these characteristics of the photograph convincingly undermine the conventional dichotomy between the official Zionist narratives and the accounts employed by Khalidi and the Palestinian scholars. Khalidi’s message is clear. Western and Zionist involvement in Palestine did not usher in modernity and progress, rather they destroyed a vibrant indigenous society.<sup>124</sup>

The photographs portray Palestinian activities in political activism, education, and professional employment. In the second half of the book, the pictures subtly depict the violence perpetrated by the British and Zionists, and the effects on the indigenous population. Khalidi’s political motives are evident in his work. In one instance, the author depicted Palestinian Muslim respect for Christian and Judaic holy sites to ward off criticism from the West by stating Palestinians were, “the most attuned to and the most respectful of the Judaic and Christian traditions.”<sup>125</sup> Following this argument, pictures of the Wailing Wall, the Dome of the Rock (Haram ash Sharif), and various Christian churches are included from the late nineteenth century. Photographs of the urban professional classes and political figures include Musa Kazim *Pasha* al-Husseini, the elder statesman of Palestinian politics in the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>126</sup> Ruhi al-Khalidi, Jerusalem’s deputy to the Ottoman parliament in 1908 is positioned next to Faidi al-Alami, the mayor of Jerusalem from 1906-1909. A group photograph of the Sixth Palestinian National Congress in Jaffa in 1925 is included.<sup>127</sup> The symbolic leader of the First Palestinian

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<sup>123</sup> Rudolf Arnheim, “On the Nature of Photography,” *Critical Inquiry* 1 (September 1974): 154.

<sup>124</sup> Moors, “Presenting Palestine’s,” 21. On theory of photography and representation see Joel Snyder and Neil Walsh Allen, “Photography, Vision, and Representation,” *Critical Inquiry* 2 no.1 (Autumn, 1975): 143-169.

<sup>125</sup> W. Khalidi, *Before*, 54

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, 99.

Guerilla Operations, Shaikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam is pictured alongside a picture of the funeral of Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husseini who died from wounds at the hands of the British in 1934.<sup>128</sup>

School photographs make up a major portion of this work including sections on schools, libraries, athletic teams and games, and a group of boy scouts from Jaffa join with pictures of teachers, lawyers, and medical doctors throughout. Photographs of agricultural production such as grains, bananas, grapes, melons, olives, vegetables, tobacco and oranges are also found in the book. Industrial and artisan products are shown such as soap factories, quilt making, weaving, pottery, flour mills, and match factories receive attention.

Women are pictured not as traditional or subordinated, but as fully involved in the process of modernization and production. Most of the photographed women are in family portraits, wedding pictures, or educationally related settings. A picture of schools for girls at the Christian Orthodox School in Beit Jala in 1906 is included. Girls are pictured dancing in the gymnasium at the Jerusalem Girls' College in the early 1940s.<sup>129</sup> Women's involvement in politics is shown by a picture of a delegation of Palestinian women protesting the harsh British measurements following the 1929 disturbances.<sup>130</sup>

One of the most interesting aspects of the work is the evaluation and representation of the peasantry, juxtapositioned with the pictures of the urban elite and cities. Whereas the cities, especially Jerusalem and the coastal areas, are represented as centers of modernity and leadership, the representation of the rural areas and the peasantry express urban residents' romantic nostalgia for traditional lifestyles and dress.<sup>131</sup> Salim Tamari argued that Arab nationalists in early twentieth century began glorifying the peasantry as the embodiment of the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>129</sup> W. Khalidi, *Before*, 70; 293.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>131</sup> This argument is put forward by Moors, "Presenting Palestine's," 22.

pure and authentic nation.<sup>132</sup> Similarly, Ted Swedenburg argued that Palestinian nationalists in the 1950s, owing to Palestinian experiences with Zionist settler colonialism, strongly asserted the significance of the peasantry as the national signifier because of the peasants' attachment to the land.<sup>133</sup> Pictures of the rural landscape in *Before Their Diaspora* are represented as timeless and as expressive images of a perfectly imagined geography undamaged by British and Zionist intervention and occupation, a return to true fantastic Palestinian cultural roots.

When political power is contested, images can portray forms of countering representations that challenge, resist, and subvert hegemonic interpretations of history. Images can limit interpretative agency and push a preferred reading, but they also engender empathy and closeness for the viewer that can break down political positions. *Before Their Diaspora* represents an alternative source of history that pushes for the acceptance of the Palestinian people prior to 1948. The images in the book embody a symbolic national past and also constitute a source to aid in the maintenance of Palestinian identity among interviewees contemplating their political and cultural roots in the diaspora.

### Nasser

I interviewed Nasser and Hamad in their home in Raleigh, NC in November, 2005.<sup>134</sup> Nasser was the first Palestinian that I had met by chance who brought up *Before Their Diaspora* in the context of our interview. I then began to incorporate questions about the work into the scope of my interviews. I discovered that many interviewees had heard of Khalidi's work and either previously looked through it or owned it. As my interviews continued, I realized the importance of this work for my Palestinian informants and the role it played in defining their

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<sup>132</sup> Salim Tamari, "Soul of the Nation: The Fallah in the Eyes of the Urban Intelligentsia," *Review of Middle East Studies* 5 (1992): 74-84.

<sup>133</sup> Ted Swedenburg, "The Palestinian Peasant as National Signifier," *Anthropological Quarterly* 63 no. 1 (1990): 18-30.

<sup>134</sup> Nasser. Interviewed by author, 23 November 2005, Raleigh, N.C.

political and cultural identities. At this point in the current interview, I had asked Nasser if he could explain how the Palestinian people exist as a national and cultural group if there is no official nation-state of Palestine to call home.

*...Let me tell you why. I know the Palestinians exist because here I am flesh and blood. My parents came from Palestine, their parents from Palestine, their parents from Palestine. I can not make this up. I don't care who it is that says we don't exist they are wrong. I have a book that has old pictures, can you argue with that? Let me get it. Walid Khalidi, Before Their Diaspora. Look at these pictures, have you seen this. How can someone prove this wrong? These pictures show the native people, the land, the cities, schools, politicians, the agriculture, everything. I look at these photographs often because it reminds me of my past, my parents' past. These pictures are a reminder to everyone, Palestinian, Israeli, American, British, I don't care, that we exist. This book is not only objective history, it represents hope of returning to our homeland. These pictures show our homeland, no one can destroy that. The Israelis can change the names of the villages, tear down other ones, it doesn't matter. It existed and still does. This is proof and I am proof.*

#### Abdullah and Lydia

I met Abdullah in August 2005 in Wilmington, NC while attempting to contact his brother about an interview.<sup>135</sup> Abdullah, born in 1969, was raised in the United States by his Palestinian parents who had immigrated to Detroit, Michigan in 1967. Both of his parents had been born and raised in the West Bank city of Ram'allah in the 1930s. Abdullah's father had attended high school and some college classes but did not finish his college degree because of the 1967 war. He and his wife immigrated to the United States in order to escape the occupation of the West Bank by the Israeli army.

Abdullah and his wife moved to Wilmington, NC in 1994 because he was tired of the cold weather in Detroit and also because he had an opportunity to start a business with his brother in Wilmington. Abdullah became aware of Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora* while attending a Palestinian cultural event in Detroit soon after the book was first published. His impressions of the photographs were most revealing. While I had asked Abdullah for an

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<sup>135</sup> Abdullah and Lydia. Interviewed by author, 7 December 2005, Wilmington, N.C.

interview in August, it was not until December that he finally felt he had time to meet. He began talking about Khalidi's work after I asked him if the Palestinians existed as a people.

*...The first time I saw the book I was like, wow, I can see the Palestine that my parents always talked about. There is the rolling hills of olive trees and the orange fields. The pictures of the countryside are what I liked the most. Growing up in the United States, my parents, especially my father, would always talk about eating the Jaffa orange and how good it tasted, not like the ones from Florida. Those are good, but not like the ones from my homeland. It's different, you know? I think the Israelis are selling those now, but it isn't the same. Not growing up in Palestine, everything I knew was what my parents told me. Our land looked like this, our house like that, now I could see this, it was such a positive experience. I felt connected. I could see it with my own two eyes.*

He also told me that after he had seen Khalidi's book he had to buy it. He uses this text to show his daughter, Lydia, what her distant homeland of Palestine used to look like before Israel was created. Lydia, who is 12 years old, provided a perspective that shows how her identity as a Palestinian has been encouraged by the book even though she has never been to Israel/Palestine. Abdullah interjected that the pictures gave Lydia something positive to look at. He readily admitted that he and his wife talked to Lydia about the current situation in Palestine and reminded her that while the Palestinian people today are branded with negative stereotypes in the American media, the collective history and piety of the people could be seen in the photographs. These are Lydia's comments:

*...My mama and "baba" have always tried to teach me that I am Palestinian and where we come from. A lot of nights he will pull out the picture book and show me pictures of costumes that the women wear and say that those are the costumes of our ancestors and show me pictures of the animals and the land. I really like the one those girls is (sic) wearing because of all the coins they have on (59). I wish I had a scarf like that. Over here I like that picture because it looks like my baba (57). I am scared to go to Palestine now because of what the news says about it. I like the pictures in the book much better.*

Nazif<sup>136</sup>

I first met Nazif in Raleigh, NC during Ramadan at the Islamic Center before the breaking of the day's fast, iftar, in September, 2005.<sup>137</sup> He was born in 1928 in Jerusalem and

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<sup>136</sup> Nazif is a pseudonym requested by the interviewee. His wife's name, Marie, is also a pseudonym.



came to the United States in 1992 to join his son who had come to study at the University of Texas in 1988. Nazif's wife of many years had died before his immigration to the U.S. and he had remarried, Marie, an American woman, in 1994. Nazif described with a nostalgic passion his childhood growing up in Jerusalem and the circumstances that led to the takeover of Palestine by the Zionists in 1948. Nazif's wife has never been to Palestine to visit Nazif's homeland because at Nazif's and Marie's age, the difficulty it would entail to travel to Israel is too much for them to bear. I interviewed Nazif in November, 2005 at his home in Raleigh. I had borrowed *Before Their Diaspora* from Nasser, who I interviewed the day before, and taken it with me to ask Nazif if he recognized any of the people or places in the photographs from his childhood.

*Of course I recognize this land, it is my homeland. My heart longs for this past everyday. When I see the photographs of the Dome of the Rock I think that is my home. I grew up not far from there and I could look out my window and see the gold dome. My father and mother would walk me through the streets just like you see here and we would talk to everyone. My father would stop and chat but my mother would always stay behind with me and my brother and sisters. Look at that picture of the King David hotel. I saw that destruction, I lie to you not, it was unreal. This pictures do not lie. The land was beautiful before Nakba. Now there is nothing left for us.*

Nazif believed the book would be educational and enjoyable for his wife in order to provide her with some visual context as to where Nazif grew up.

*I have some old photographs that I show her of my family and stuff, but I do not have a collection like this. This is something I would like to show her. That way she will see what Palestine looked like when I was a child. I tell her all the time it wasn't like it is now, but I can only tell her so much. The news only shows the worst part. Insha 'allah, she will see it one day, probably from heaven. [laughing] I do not know. Maybe I will have to go buy this book.*

## Conclusion

Khalidi's *Before Their Diaspora*, negates, to an extent, the current crisis of the Palestinian diaspora and the lack of a nation-state by reconfiguring the relationship of place and

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<sup>137</sup> Nazif. Interviewed by author, 24 November 2005, Raleigh, N.C.

present circumstances to identity. These photographs make conscious the historical origin of the shape, the habits, and the changing predicament of the Palestinians' existential present situation. The greatest personal crisis of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries for post-colonial, subaltern, and diasporic societies is the crisis over identity. *Before Their Diaspora* emphasizes shaping present multiple identities and dynamic contexts to produce a common historical root with a clearly defined political goal. Among the Palestinian-Americans whom I interviewed that cited Khalidi's work as a wellspring of their political and cultural identity, each story was a unique introspection that elucidated how the Palestinian political and cultural movement carries on despite its unfavorable circumstances. For instance, in the last chapter, Zahira spoke of books she and her husband demanded to be put in Wake County School Libraries, *Before Their Diaspora* was one of the books she demanded.<sup>138</sup> *Before Their Diaspora* serves multiple purposes: it challenges dominant official Western and Zionist narratives; represents through images the political and cultural roots of Palestine and Palestinians; and serves as a tool to disseminate an original collective identity to those Palestinians in diaspora. The characteristics of the photographs accentuate the transmission and acceptance of the historical presence of an active, diverse, and productive indigenous Palestinian population prior to 1948.

This work ironically represents the official national historical memory but at the same time negates the subaltern voice that it supposedly attempts to represent in opposition to some Israeli and Western official narratives. I argue that by including pictures aimed at countering other official historical narratives, and to represent the bounded national self, this work ignores the true essences of Palestinian identity: plurality and fluidity. It is with this in mind scholars must question the intent of this work and others like it. Does it accurately portray the Palestinian people? Does it seek to foster the continuance of the traditional elite, upper-class leadership? Or

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<sup>138</sup> Zahira, interviewed by author, Raleigh, NC, 2 December 2005.

does it simply exist to accentuate the national struggle? These are relevant questions researchers have to ponder in dealing with this subject.

## CONCLUSION

*Man can never be reduced to one personality who can be summed up in an acceptable simplification. This is everyone's pipe dream.*

Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*<sup>139</sup>

When I began writing my thesis, I recalled Braudel's quote which I had come across while studying for my Global History comprehensive exam in 2005. In general, Braudel's works emphasize the long cohabitation of culturally diverse peoples within the same well-defined geographical area surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. These studies stress the shared experience of the societies in the Mediterranean world, pointing out commonalities while not overlooking their distinctive characteristics. This method of analysis has had a great impact on my own studies and work. When I have reread my past writings, I can see my own endeavors to stress common history among peoples, to make the shared experience, including the similarities and differences, more important than writing exclusive, bounded studies.

Similarly, I approached this study to examine the connections between Palestinians-Americans and their imagined homeland and its effects on their identity. I have not attempted to study Palestinian identity in its entirety; rather I have concentrated upon a select group of Palestinian-Americans that I felt like provided a beginning point for responsible analysis. I have stressed the difficulties in attempting to study Palestinian identity: diaspora, lack of the historical and logistical infrastructure historians rely on, no nation-state and its bureaucracies, occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and some Israeli and Western denial of Palestinian history. Nonetheless, identity as Palestinians has persisted among those people that claim an ancestral lineage and/or other attachments to Palestine. In the select group of interviewees I chose for this

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<sup>139</sup> Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 444.

study, their positionings and identities were all diverse, yet each were adamant in their attachment to Palestine and continuing a form of struggle and resistance necessary to maintain their own personally defined Palestinian identity.

This study advances the proposition that Palestinian identity, among Palestinian-Americans, is ambiguous, dynamic, unbounded, and fluid. These factors aside, Palestinian identity has found itself in the crosshairs of attempts to limit or negate its existence. Palestinian officials and intellectuals have written authoritative national narratives attempting to officialize the Palestinian historical experience and present reality. Some scholars have argued that these works seek to consolidate national leadership in the hands of a few upper-middle class individuals. These works do not take into account that the Palestinian historical experience is inherently diverse, therefore negating any national identity. Palestinian identity is a personalized international identity.

As I write this today in the Spring of 2006, the nation-state of Israel continues to build its “security” wall, *Hamas* has taken control of the Palestinian government, the Gaza Strip is in the midst of a food crisis, and the United States and the European Union have refused to send financial aid to the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian parastate designed after the Oslo Accords of 1993 has failed to realize its potential because of many setbacks caused by both the Israeli and Palestinian side.

Travel to and from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip has become almost impossible for local Palestinians and also Palestinian-Americans trying to see their family or visit their former homes. In July 2005, Musa, a Palestinian-American from Wilmington, was denied entry into the West Bank by Israeli officials because he had no Palestinian identification, only an American passport. In order to enter, the officials informed him that he would have to renounce his

American citizenship and claim a Palestinian one. Musa immediately left Israel with his family to fly back to Wilmington.<sup>140</sup>

These factors have contributed to the difficulty in the construction and maintenance of Palestinian identity among Palestinian-Americans. As the younger generations, who were born in the United States, begin to grow up and question their identities where will they turn for answers. If travel is limited, how will they see and experience Palestine? If official histories are constructed, how will their individualized experience be articulated? Every one of the interviewees responded that they did not believe they were properly being represented by the Palestinian Authority. How will Palestinian-American children grow up being represented? The medium that has emerged as the preferred connector, constructor, and maintainer of Palestinian identity among Palestinian-Americans is the internet.

The internet serves as an easily accessible avenue to the acquisition of historical resources on Palestine fostering the national movement, attachment to Palestine, questions of customs, and allowing Palestinians around the world to stay in touch with the news, their family and homes in Palestine. The internet increasingly functions as a resource for non-scholarly information for Palestinians and others. Palestinians have created websites in English, French, Arabic, and Spanish and transcribed oral sources into written sources. Websites document Palestinian texts, poems, pictures, opinion pieces, and articles by professional and nonprofessional writers and artists. A recent addition to the web is a site created by Palestinian students answering questions about their daily lives.<sup>141</sup> Since 1998 and the fiftieth anniversary of the Palestinian catastrophe, al-Nakba especially, Palestinian websites have provided Palestinians in the diaspora with a connection to events and news in Palestine. Daily, websites such the

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<sup>140</sup> Musa, interviewed by author, digital recording, Wilmington, NC, 19 November 2005.

<sup>141</sup> The website's address is [www.lifebehindthewall.com](http://www.lifebehindthewall.com).

“Electronic Intifada,” and “Al-Quds,” document the daily news and include daily diary entries from different Palestinians.<sup>142</sup> Obviously, the Internet is an essential resource for Palestinians in Raleigh and Wilmington to stay connected to Palestine historically, socially, and culturally. The abundance of information provides Palestinians in the United States a plethora of ways to experience life back in Palestine. I feel this will further diversify the Palestinian identity because there are so many abundant stories and sites to view.

The interviewees found in this study represent a small group of Palestinian-Americans. Their recorded oral testimonies have been preserved and transcribed rendering new primary sources that had not existed before. I feel this is the most significant contribution of my thesis. All of the informants are part of the Palestinian diaspora and daily have to confront their positionings and attachments to Palestine. I believe that one has to embrace Braudel’s quote above to understand the multiplicity that is Palestinian identity. In the globalizing world, I would argue that it is imperative to view ourselves as connected to peoples around the world and this should be reflected in scholarship.

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<sup>142</sup> These two websites are the tip of the iceberg in relation to websites on Palestine. [www.electronicintifada.net](http://www.electronicintifada.net) and [www.alquds.com](http://www.alquds.com)

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